The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

Agriculture Series

R. KEITH SEVERIN

Interviewed by: Allan Mustard

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Q: We're in the residence of Keith and Barbara Severin in Virginia. It is the 16th of September, 2006, and would you please tell us, Keith, a little bit about your background, where you were born and where you grew up, and how you ended up going to college?

SEVERIN: I was born in the panhandle of Texas during the days of the Dust Bowl, maybe before the Dust Bowl really got started. In November of 1932, I remember very well, I was just a little guy. My mother and father had come to town and probably voted for FDR and they left me with Aunt Pearl. Uncle Bill, her husband, he was manager of the local farm co-op there in Booker, Texas, and Booker, at that time, and the greater metropolitan area, probably had a population of 300. It was so big, in fact, that the newspaper in town, the "Booker News," a weekly, put out a calendar every year and one page for each month, and for whatever day of the month it was, the person in the area whose birthday that happened to be, that was written in there on the calendar.

But, anyway, I remember that day that FDR was elected because I was running around in Uncle Bill and Aunt Pearl's backyard and had a sucker in my mouth and fell down and broke the sucker stick off in my tonsil, but nonetheless. So I was born in the Dust Bowl of the panhandle of Texas.

In March of 1935, my mother and father took off for California with four little boys, I being the oldest, and my youngest brother at that time, the fourth of us boys, Taylor, was just four months old. And we really left because Taylor was a sickly, puny little guy and very prone to dust pneumonia and, had we stayed there, we would have lost him.

So March 1935, we went to southern California, where my mother's oldest sister had gone, she and her family, a year or so before. So we went there. As I put it, though, everything that has happened, the grapes of wrath were not all sour, not where the Severins were concerned, the reason being my father, who had no education, was a good and reliable worker. He could do anything. And my mother was a good worker, too. Her mother died when my mother was 11 years old, and my mother never really had a girlhood, never had a childhood, because she was at home with two older brothers, a father and five younger sisters, and she had to take care of all of them. And she went to school, too.

We knew how to get things done, and it occurred to me the other day that the first house that we lived in, in Pomona, California, 730 West Monterey Street, I remember there was the milkman, who drove his wagon down the street, delivering milk, and he had a horse. I had a little red wagon, and I followed him down the street and got the horse manure and brought it back, and that went into our garden. So I know about these kind of things.

That brings it to mind, too, that we were so poor there in the panhandle of Texas, and goodness only knows, there were no trees, very, very few trees, and only then along the creek bottom. But I would take my little red wagon and go out in the pasture and pick up cow chips. That's what we used to heat the houses with. That's what mother used for her cook stove, so I've been close to it all my life. I know what the real stuff is.

And so we were there in southern California and in 1936 my mother had another boy, Kenton. That was the youngest, and there are just a couple weeks less than seven years between me and Kenton, the oldest and the youngest, and grew up there in southern California, always having to work, always working, doing something, working in stores, learning to get along with people, helping people.

I remember in World War II, for example, when we were living in El Monte, we had a place with about an acre and we had a cow and we had chickens, of course, and we had rabbits, and I had some racing pigeons, as well. I had a hundred does, rabbits. I had a hundred does and so I raised rabbits in World War II and would kill them at eight weeks old and butcher them and I'd cut them up and sell the meat for a dollar, but I was getting more than that for the rabbit hide, which I dried. And getting more than that for the hide because rabbit fur, rabbit hide, were used to line the jackets of bomber pilots and folks who were in aircraft.

So I was there and graduated from high school at 16, a dumb thing to do, because I hadn't really grown up, but I knew how to work. I just knew how to work and graduated from high school at 16 and went to live with my grandparents, who were about 30 miles away. Their youngest son was away and in the Army, then. And Jack is only about three years older than I am, but he was away and in the Army and I lived with my grandparents, that's my mother's father and stepmother, and they had moved to southern California, there.

My first year in college, I didn't have a car yet. I didn't have a car yet. But I hitchhiked to school. I walked about two miles to the highway, to the main highway, and then got a ride for about 10 miles up the road and I still had a mile and a half going the other direction to go to school. But that's how I did my first year in college, and that was at Chaffey College, in Ontario, California.

And what a time for me to be a 16-year-old, first year in college. What a time it was because that was exactly the year that the vets, the veterans from World War II, came back and went to college. And my best friend, Elmore Worth, was the same age as my father.

The second year in college, my parents had move from El Monte over to Ontario, and that summer that they had moved, probably helping to make the decision to move was that my brother, Kenneth, just younger than we were quite close, Kenny and had been killed in an airplane crash. But, anyway, I think that helped them move from where we were at the time, from where they were living there at the time.

They moved to Ontario, California, and so I was living at home. It was that summer that I bought my first car, a 1934 Chevy Coupe, $495. It was the first car that I ever drove, and it was money that I'd earned myself, 50 cents an hour. I knew how to drive because I had been driving not only tractors, but Marine trucks. There in the Texas panhandle, I'd go back and help and work for particularly Aunt Alice, who was my mother's sister, and Aunt Alice and Uncle Harold had to help them, work for them in the summertime. Six dollars a day, if the harvest was finished and you were plowing or $8 a day if it was still during grain harvest. Of course, that included room and board. You worked hard, but you felt good and you were 15 miles from town and never any opportunity to go to town to spend that $6 or $8 a day that you were getting, but good times, good summers.

So, at the end of my second year in college, I had, of course, a degree in general agriculture, I supposed you'd say, from Chaffey College. And Rex Wignall had been my main teacher. And, incidentally, my second year in college I played football on the Chaffey College team and we went to the second annual Junior Rose Bowl, played in the Rose Bowl, and we weren't supposed to beat the team from Lawton, Oklahoma, but we did.

Anyway, that's the first two years in college. And so Rex Wignall had gone to school at Davis and he had been under agricultural education, and his main man was Sid Sutherland, who was head of the Agricultural Education Department there at Davis. So one morning in September of 1948, I put my things into my car and mother came out and said, Keith, let me know when you get there.

So I took off 400 miles north to Davis, California. Didn't know where it was, didn't know anybody there. I knew a name, Sidney Sutherland, and at the end of the day I pulled into Davis and found out where Mr. Sutherland's office was and went outside of town, found a place where I could get room and board, and that's where I started my first year at the University of California, Davis, in 1948.

But I will say that I worked more than I studied. I didn't do that well academically. But probably the best thing that happened to me that year was that in the chemistry lab there was a real good-looking lady, girl, next to me there, and her name was Barbara Stoakin. Anyway, she was living in the girls' dorm there at South Hall and, anyway, Barbara and I started dating.

In June of 1950, two years later, we got married, and we've been married a little over 56 years, now. The year before we got married, Barbara was living with the Dean and Emma Ryerson. He was dean at the College of Agriculture. She was living with him and she cooked for them.

And that year I was a sleeper. I lived in the city firehouse. There were five of us. There was a volunteer department. They had one paid man who was there from 8:00 in the morning until 5:00 in the evening, five days a week. It was up to us volunteers, it was up to us sleepers, to man the fire department the rest of the time. And, basically, what that meant was just being there.

It was a college town, and Davis was not big then, at that time, a study body of 1,100, 1,000 men and 100 women, so you can see how lucky I was with Barbara. Sometimes I can't help but think that she probably wonders if she had better choices than what she got. But I worked, as I say, while living there at the city firehouse, that meant I had to be there. We had a rotation. You had to be there from 5:00 in the evening until 8:00 in the morning, and then you had to be there all weekend, so that all worked out.

But I was able to work that out and at the same time during that year I paid my way through school. It cost me $30 a month to go to school. I left the car parked, used a bicycle. Davis is a flatland college, and rode the bike to school and wherever I had to go, and I made a dollar an hour doing gardening.

Ms. Snill U. Branch was the school librarian. I had $4 a week from Ms. Branch every Sunday morning from 8:00 until noon. If it was good weather, I worked in her yard. If the weather was not good, I cleaned house for her. I always stopped at 9:00 in the morning to have a cup of hot chocolate and a cookie or a donut or something.

Ms. Branch knew that I needed the money, and so I was always there. I had some other jobs around. I worked for the Garst family, the corn Garst family. If she was going to have a party, she would ask Barbara to come and do the cooking for her.

But I earned enough money that when Barbara and I got married in June of 1950, we spent the first month staying at a house for one of the professors in the School of Veterinary Medicine. He was an entomologist, Dr. Douglas, Jim Douglas and his wife. We stayed in their house, took care of the place, didn't pay any rent. But when they came back from vacation and we were getting ready to go to school, we moved into our own house, which we owned totally.

It was a 16-foot house trailer, 16 feet from the back of the taillight to the front of the hitch, and I paid for that with what I had earned the year before. We lived in it for a year. It cost us $11 a month to keep the trailer there. It was $10 for trailer rent and $1 because we had a washing machine. But I was the gas man for Slater's Court, the name of the trailer park. I took care of all the propane gas and that, and so we got our gas for nothing.

Anyway, we lived in it for a year and I sold it for 500 bucks. So you learn to work, you do what you've got to do. That year that we were married, that first year that we were married, I finished my bachelor's degree there at Davis, and Barbara was just going into her senior year. She was in the economics of the household under Dr. Jean Warren and her brother. Jean came from Ithaca and Cornell people and that.

But our first year that we were married there, and the first semester, I was getting my teaching credential, as it were, in ag education. And so I was down not that far away at Dixon, California, doing student teaching or whatever it was. I've forgotten what it was and, anyway, helping Glen Caldwell with his little ag classes and that.

I didn't know Dick Rominger [Richard Rominger was later deputy secretary of agriculture in the Clinton Administration] at the time, but the gal that he married, I knew her, and one of her brothers was one of my students at Dixon. That was good and, again, we're making do and I'm working and we're working our way through.

I know Barbara, that first summer that we were married, she worked for Dr. Winkler, who was the main viticulturalist there, and she was doing very empirical research. She was counting how many grapes there were on a bunch and then how many seeds in each grape. That's empirical research, I think.

I continued with my lawn jobs and doing whatever I could to make a buck to get us through, and we ended up not owing anybody anything. I had an old 12-gauge shotgun, and yes, I would go goose hunting, so sometimes I'd spend a day picking geese. I knew I was out one morning in barley fields and was lying down along a fence line, and real foggy, and I thought, if I can see them, I know I can hit them.

The limit was two. I had one in the bag. Here they came, so I waited until I got ahold of the V, the leg of the V, and I had some twos in the left barrel and I fired and three came out, three geese fell. As I say, the limit was one. Well, I already had four, so what the heck? A goose, a gander, so that morning I went home by back roads with seven geese in the bag, and from that one box of shells, 25 shells, I got 21 geese.

Along about that time, too, there was a fellow by the name of Furstinow, Lloyd Furstinow, and the Department of Navy were looking for people to go to American Samoa, Pago Pago, to teach the Samoans agriculture. The Samoans, in American Samoa, there were a lot of them who were in the U.S. Marine Corps during World War II.

Well, the harbor of Pago Pago, that was the main staging base for the U.S. fleet in World War II. But, anyway, there were a lot of the Samoan men who had been in the U.S. Marine Corps in World War II, and so they had GI Bill benefits. Well, what do you teach those folks down there? And they figured that agriculture was the best thing that they could do. Yes, they had some shops and things like that.

So, anyway, the Navy was out looking for people to go to American Samoa to teach agriculture, so we thought about it and the offer was made and we went to San Francisco in the Navy offices and signed up and all that kind of stuff. And so in early June of 1951, Barbara did not go to her own graduation exercises when she got her bachelor's degree at Davis, we weren't around, because we were on our way to American Samoa.

We went to Alameda Navy Air Station, just south of San Francisco, and got on a flying boat. It seemed like we taxied all night long, but finally it took off. When we landed, we were in Pearl Harbor and we were in Pearl Harbor for a couple of days. Then we were in Pearl Harbor for a couple of days and we were there, in fact, for Barbara's 21st birthday and our first wedding anniversary. We were married on her 20th birthday and we were there in Pearl Harbor.

Then we took off, I believe it was a Monday morning, on the USS Halsey, for American Samoa, for Pago Pago. And there were a few people onboard who had been recruited to go work in American Samoa, mostly in the education field. There were a couple of people who were going to be working, be connected with the public health system there.

And then I'll never forget this day, on June the 21st of 1951, we were going along and I felt a bump, as I say, when the USS Halsey crossed the equator. We went from the longest day of the year in the Northern Hemisphere to the shortest day of the year in the Southern Hemisphere. We crossed the equator on June the 21st.

And then, anyway, on Sunday morning, we were supposed to have arrived in Pago Pago early that Sunday morning, but there were a lot of the Navy people who were getting ready to come out and they had a big party Saturday night and they weren't feeling too good Sunday morning and so arrival in Pago Pago was delayed. But we arrived in American Samoa June, maybe the 25th or 26th or something like that, of 1951.

I was there to help with thand this was all in the Department of Navy, like I say. Then, on July 1st, administration of American Samoa was given over to the Department of the Interior. It was taken away from Navy and went to Interior, and that didn't really bother me, a few days of retirement or something like that. But I was making $3,600 a year, then, plus housing.

So, anyway, we were there and for the first couple of months we lived across the street from the hospital on the front of the house and off to the side of the house, a little bit of a vacant lot and a street and then a few houses and then there was Pago Pago Bay. The bay at that point was about a mile wide and on the other side of the bay was a mountain. It looked like a Jell-o mold, Mount Pioa, Rainmaker. And that would have been south and a little bit east, and that's the way the prevailing weather came from, and the reason they called it Rainmaker was because the clouds would come across and then they would have to go up over the top of that mountain which was, I think, a little over 1,200 feet high. That mountain would tear the bottom of the clouds out and then it would start raining. You could see the rain walking across the water of the bay. That's the reason they called it Rainmaker.

After we'd been there a couple of months, there was a fellow who was running an experiment farm. I've forgotten his wife's name, but Don Hearst, a Georgia cracker, they were scheduled to come out. And what I had been doing until I went out to where the Hearsts were at the farm, I had been working with the Samoans. And, again, it's one of the Keith Severin things is that you learn where you are.

My job, my title was puliasiafitoama, chief field inspector, puliasiafitoama. And there was a fellow who worked with me, Puno, and we spent four days a week out in the villages on different parts of the island of Tutuila, which was 18 miles long, but roads only along on the south side, not on the north side, because there it's precipitous. And we were going to the villages and I would see what the fellows were doing, the students were doing, and how can you train people, teach people, tell people, how to grow taro or breadfruit or papayas or bananas or kapok any easier than they do, given the climate that they've got down there and that wonderful volcanic soil.

So I really devoted my time to try to teach them something about soil conservation, because it's hilly, more sleep slopes and that, and try to teach them how to be effective planting their tiapula, their taro-planting material, offset rather than the straight rows. And we would do little experiments to show them that if they did that and if they used some nasu, mulch, on that, how they could keep the soil from washing. Of course, it rains a whole lot down there, probably something like 300 inches a year. So that was the thing that I did mostly.

And then, too, I raised a lot of bananas, and the bananas are a starchy, staple food, and there is a scab moth that will come into the blossom of the banana and somewhere I'd read in that that you just take wood ash, and so I showed them how you could open the banana, the calix of the banana and throw wood ash up in there and it would kill the scab moth so it wouldn't be eating on the peeling of the banana.

Then, go down to the coral reef and bring some coral up and burn it to get some lime, to make some lime to use as soil additives and that. It was just simple things, learning to use what there was available.

So Puno and I would go into different parts of the island four days a week and then we spent one day, the Friday of the week, or one day of the week, in the ag office writing reports and doing administrative-type things.

As a consequence of having known the island of Tutuila so very intimately, better than any other palongi, white person, down there. One time there was a Danish oceanographic vessel, the Dalatia, came in. And we got acquainted with a young fellow, Carsten Federson, who was walking along the road. I stopped, picked him up, took him out to the farm. We got acquainted and took him back and that, and, anyway, I remember this oceanographic expedition.

There was another fellow there, Paul Jacobson, who was an ornithologist, and he wanted to collect some birds in Samoa, so I took Paul out and we collected some bird specimens for him, because I knew where to go and how to go and those kinds of things. But, again, it's just from knowing where you are.

It was a little more than the last year that we werl did this field puliasiafitoama work for almost a year and then Barbara and I moved out to the experiment farm. We had probably the best place on the island to live, I'm sure that we were. We lived in a house they called polisuka, the sugar house. The sugar house was built by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association and the house sat up on a hill, and off to the south was a big valley. I say a big valley, maybe five acres or so. There was sugarcane.

What the HSPA, the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association, were doing, they were working on a Fiji disease that was some kind of disease that would affect the sugarcane, and they did not want to do that in Hawaii, and so they had a couple of people who came down there to do that and the built this lovely house, way up on a hill. They were ending their work there, and I always got a kick out of Mrs. Menarde, the lady. She was a real marketer for the sugar people.

She had served coffee. She said, "One lump, or two?"

"No, I don't take any. I don't use sugar."

"Well, take one and don't stir."

"Well, I use one lump."

"Well, take two and don't stir."

They were wonderful people, but, anyway, the polisuka was located out between two native villages. This was a good 10 miles from the station, from Pago Pago Bay, Harbor, itself. And we were out there between these two native villages and it was an experiment farm and that's where students, again, trying to learn something about agriculture.

Students would come in every day, a few of them, to learn something about agriculture, but yet, the land there, the farm, was quite level, not very typical of the regular terrain in Samoa. We could stand on our back porch, as it were, and look 180 degrees from Western Samoa 30 miles off to the west, all the way around to the south, and it was just ocean, just ocean. Sometimes, we would see schools of whale going. And, looking in the other direction, it was basically just coconut palms and copra was supposedly one of the crops down there.

But one of the other things that we did there at the farm, in addition to the students, and it was a main thing, was to grow some vegetables for the other white folks who lived in the station, who lived in town. So Barb and or maybe Barbara wouldn't go. I'd go to town twice a week and we'd take tomatoes and corn and things that we'd grown there on the farm.

I could grow my sweet corn. We planted 250 feet of sweet corn, five 50-foot rows every two weeks and we had corn the year round, and at the end of 60 days, the corn would have been taken to town and enjoyed, and we'd taken the stalks and cut them off and maybe take them some papayas that weren't used one way or another and take them to the dairy.

Well, the dairy was about five miles away, and it was way up in a valley. I've forgotten the name of the mountain that that was under. That was the highest peak there, 1,400 feet. But we had some old dairy cows there, some Holsteins that had been brought in from Christmas Island during World War II. So those old cows got milked, and they were milked by hand because there was no electricity, milked by hand. The milk was picked up every morning, taken to the hospital, then pasteurized. The primary use for that was for the tubercular patients there in the hospital, and then also for the palongi, for the other white folks there in the station.

Enele, E-N-E-L-E, Henry, who spoke no English at all, but his wife was the real manager, Enele, I got a kick out of him, because when I was asked to, I managed both the experiment farm and the dairy. I asked him how many cows there were, and I said write them down. He said so many cows, so many bull cows, so many bull cows chopped. Those were steers, but that was his terminology.

We always had enough milk, regardless. We always had enough milk to meet our demand for the tubercular patients in the hospital and for the palongi in the station because the young fellow who ran the truck and took care of the pasteurizing and that, he knew how much milk we needed. If he had a couple of old cows that were dry or something, didn't have enoughey, stick the water hose in the tank and you always had enough. You learn how to make do.

But, again, out there and working with the people, and such wonderful people. Paca Maie was my farm foreman, and Paca was my high-paid man. He got $34 every two weeks. And it was hard to come by seeds, seeds for planting the different vegetables, your Chinese cabbage or cucumbers or whatever. But for the Samoan, one package of seed was enough for one row. It didn't matter how long or short the row was, or how large r small the package was, and so I was very careful in trying to tell them that.

One day, they got out there and they used all the seed. Well, with Paca being my high-paid maof course, I was making $3,600 a year, so I can really talk. I said, "Paca, get your fellows out there and get all those seeds back out of the ground."

In that climate, it was very difficult to keep seeds viable, so there at the house, polisuka, Barbara and I had three refrigerators and one of them worked on bottled gas and the other two worked off coal oil, kerosene. But I had one refrigerator that I kept seeds in and, no, we didn't have any electricity there at the house.

Barbara's stove worked off bottled gas, and if we wanted electricity, I'd go downstairs and start the generator. Barbara would make waffles for breakfast and she'd open the waffle iron, put the batter in. The old generator would whirr. You didn't have to watch the light when the thing got done because the generator would really run.

That's where we spent the second and the third year of our marriage, out there at in American Samoa, polisuka, or in Pago Pago. That was our address, Pago Pago, Tutuila, American Samoa. We got airmail in every two weeks, maybe, if the airplane had made it to Suva, in Fiji, and it had made it, and then the boat had made it ontor the flying boat, TEA, the flying boat, Tasmanian Empire Airways, had made it over to Apia in Western Samoa and then our little inter-island boat, the Manuataile, had made it from Apia over to us. But for three-cent mail, regular mail, it came in every three to four months, and that's when we would get our Sunday editions of the "Los Angeles Times."

We got those and we would take them and put them in our hot locker. Then, every Sunday, we would take the paper out. The hot locker, it was a closet with a couple of light bulbs in there, and whenever the generator was working, the light bulbs would go on and that's what would keep your rice and your shoes. We didn't have anything leather with us, because it would grow mold in a minute. But the hot locker, that's where we'd put things that needed to be kept dry, and that's where the newspapers were.

We had quite a time, and then we left there in June of 1953, two-year contract was up, took the Manuataile, the little boat, inter-island boat, to Apia, spent a day or two there, went up to Mount Vaea, where Robert Louis Stevenson is buried. And the Samoans really loved him. His name was Tusitala, storyteller. Went from there, and we went there, and then we took the Tasmanian Empire Airline, a flying boat.

What a fantastic meal we had on there. I remember one thing, we had iceberg lettuce, honest-to-God lettuce that was head, because there in Samoa it was too warm for your lettuce to head, and we had that. And then we went from there to Suva, and we were in Suva, in Fiji, for a few days and then Pan American flew from Nadi across on the other side of the big island of Viti Levu. And so we took a native bus, mostly Indians there in Fiji, over to Nadi and on the way we spent one day in Sigatoka, and Sigatoka, there's a disease of bananas called Sigatoka, so I went to a banana research farm along the way to Nadi.

We got in to Nadi about, oh, 3:00, 4:00 in the afternoon, native bus, like I say, and the Pan Am fellow said, "Well, the plane doesn't come in until about 9:00 tonight, so your cabin is right up over there. Just go ahead and we'll come and get you when the airplane's there, and you would like a berth tonight, wouldn't you, in the airplane? And I said, sure, of course."

I said, "Sure, of course." Well, your overhead storage bins in your airplanes today, those were berths and Barb had her berth and I had my berth and we got on the airplane and we left and we landed overnight somewhere to refuel and didn't even know it. That was a Stratocruiser airplane, Boeing Stratocruiser, and you went downstairs to the lounge in the plane, and then it had the berths up above. Now, that's first-class travel.

We got to Hawaii, and we spent a week in Hawaii, just gradually getting back to "mainland culture," quote-unquote. And what was interesting is that the lady who took us down to the Alameda Naval Air Station when we left to go to Samoa was Nancy Moore, a good friend of a classmate of Barb's, Peter Davis, and then Nancy just happened to be in Hawaii on vacation, as we were on our way back, so Nancy saw us off. Her husband, they're big, good farmers somewhere there on the peninsula in California.

The big thing is getting out with the people, seeing what there is and getting along with them, learning what there is to learn, help them if you can help them, but learning and getting some dirt under your fingernails.

Q: So then you came back. You got back to the States, you came back to the mainland. Did you come back to California?

SEVERIN: Yes, came back to California, didn't know what to do. It was in June of 1953, what to do? Went back to Davis and did some graduate work that summeagronomy or somethinI've forgotten exactly. And then, at that juncture, there was a friend of Barbara's mother's, Elsie Litsinger, a Swiss lady, and Elsie had a farm, a dairy, in Kelseyville, just outside of Kelseyville, Lake County, California.

Her husband had died and the two sons were off and the daughter was still in school and she had a dairy and the fellow, Earl Strong, not a good farmer at all, was wasting her place and it was really run down. So it worked out that Barbara and I went up there and Earl Strong moved out and I bought a herd of cows, 35 head, and got the place rent free for fixing it up. And Barbara taking iBarbara was a real good seamstress. In fact, while we were in Samoa, she made almost all my clothes for me, not that there was anything formal, but they were good clothes. Barbara was a good seamstress.

So while we were there in Kelseyville, I had, like I said, 35 head of cows, irrigated pasture and also made hay and this didn't happen for a very long time. I mean, it didn't happen for a long time, and Barbara took in fancy sewing, made dresses for little girls in dancing classes, and she took care of the chickens and the calves, while I took care of everything else.

We got into that probably in August, or maybe September, of 1953. And then it came along November, I got a letter from Uncle Sam. It said, Dear Severin, you're almost too old to be drafted, so you better come get your butt drafted. I got drafted and sold the cows, moved back down to Los Angeles with Barbara's parents and, until I actually went into the Army, Barbara's father was head of all the reservoirs and pumping plants for L.A. city water and power, and Paul was a wonderful man, wonderful man.

But, anyway, every so often they'd need some help. Somebody would be on vacation, somebody would be sick, so I'd go and listen to the machinery run, and they had a pumping plant. So I worked for them December until January 24th, I reckon, 1954. I was inducted into the U.S. Army.

I went to Fort Ord. I went to Fort Ord for two eight-week cycles in heavy weapons and, again, knowing where you are and what you can do and that, and so I got through the 16-week cycle and they were building a golf course there at Fort Ord, because General Bourbon Bob McClure liked to play golf. Ken Venturi was a member, was in the same basic training company as I was, but Ken was never there. He was always out giving lessons to the general.

So, anyway, they were building this golf course out there and working on the greens and that and, of course, they had all kinds of coolie labor and it was fairly apparent that I knew something about that kind of thing and they wanted to know did I want to spend the rest of my two years there, working on the golf course, helping maintain the golf course. I said no, I didn't think so. I said, "Is there anything else?"

They said, "Well, there's an opening at the Army Language School to study French full-time for about seven months." No, wait, I'm getting ahead of myself. In our basic training company, there were only four of us who had finished college, and I think there were one or two other guys who had gone to college, and so we were going to go to the CIC school, Counter Intelligence School in Baltimore, so that was the reason I didn't stay there at Fort Ord on the golf courses and that.

So, then, after finishing CIC school in Dundalk, just outside of Baltimore, they were going to do me a favor. They were going to send me back home, where I could work in the field office, downtown Los Angeles. I said, "No," I said, "Is there anything else?"

"Yes, there's an opening at the Army Language School at Monterey, Presidio of Monterey, where you can study French but you might have to go overseas, afterwards."

I said, "Gee, that's tough." So, anyway, went off to the Army Language School at the Presidio of Monterey and studied French, never studied harder in my life, worked harder in my life. It was difficult. Six hours a day in class and you had K.P. one day. You were still expected to perform the next day in class. Six hours a day in class, at least three hours at night getting ready for class the next day. Tough, tough, tough.

When we went there, Barbara was pregnant with Kenneth, and the first month we lived at Pacific Grove, in a motel, and it was really beautiful in the fall of the year. I'd go home for lunch and Barb would be sitting out front in a chair reading and the bushes were just covered with monarch butterflies. The sun would be cominjust glorious.

And then we moved from there, got an apartment upstairs just on the outskirts of where Pacific Grove and Monterey all come together and we had our upstairs apartment. Barb was in real good shape, because one week she would walk to the Pacific Grove Library. She was back and forth between the libraries, and I'd get home from school in the evening and we'd go down on the rocks in Monterey there and go fishing a little bit.

To learn those dialogues, whew, whew, Friday night and Saturday night I took off, but Sunday night, you were right back at the books. Mais, je vais encore la langue franï¿½aise, parce que les professeurs ï¿½taient tres, tres idiot pour moi. No complaints.

So then what we do? Kenneth is born in March of 1955. I finished school there in May, I suppose it is, had a little bit of a break and we moved back down with Barbara's folks while I'm on leave before I go overseas. Well, where do I go overseas? I go to Germany. Good for us.

So I'm there in Germany in Offenbach, 66 CIC headquarters, and I see that I can do a little more good if do some German, because certainly the French is not coming in. And then Barb and Ken come over in August, I reckon it is, late July or August, and he's just a little wart, good-looking, blond-headed little guy, and even though only five or six months old, full head of blond hair and already had a haircut, and, boy, did he get on with the German grandmas, blue eyes and blond hair.

I convinced them that I could do more for the Army if I knew some German, so all right, they send me to Oberammergau, and I'm down there about a week before Barb and Ken come down, and I found some housing for us. And so September, October, November, or October, November, Decembeanyway, three months, maybe a little over three months, full-time German, eight of us.

There were three sections of us, eight to a section, and I remember going in and they're trying to put us where we belong and we're all Americans, except I think there are a couple of Canadians in there. So we're going in and they're trying to put us where we belong based on how much German we know, and Guten Tag, they said. I smiled at them, and, bitte nehmen Sie Platz, and I smiled at them. Bitte nehmen Sie Platz, and I smile at them and they said, "Mr. Severin, please have a seat."

"Oh, okay." Well, that's how much German I knew when I started. I worked hard and we lived with a German family, Frau Weinhertzel and her daughter. We lived in the first house outside of the Kaserne, and just across the street from the house, it went straight up the mountain. Then you could see the Gams [Chamois, a species of mountain sheep, prized by Alpine hunters] up there, the mountain sheep and that, but we lived with Frau Weinhertzel and her daughter, and they had a dog, Schwartzie. Of course, Schwartzie was black.

I worked hard and ended up tops in the class. I had a good time. I worked hard, it paid off there in Oberammergau. And, not knowing when we were getting through with the Army Language School at Monterey, at the Presidio, where we were going to go, I had bought and paid for a car. I was going to get it, pick it up and go overseas. It was a Citroï¿½n, a French car, why not. Just go through with a French class, I'm going to go France. It didn't happen that way.

So I had stayed in touch with the Citroï¿½n people and in November of 1955, and I delayed picking the car up because that was at the time the new DS19 was coming out, the one that would raise and lower automatically, a pretty fancy car. It was one of those models that De Gaulle went around in.

So, anyway, no, that was not the car that I wanted. In November of 1955, we were there in Oberammergau. November the 10th, Barbara and I took off from Oberammergau and went down to Vienna and caught the Oriental Express [sic] and went to Paris to pick up a new car, the Onze-Legï¿½re. It looks like a '34 Ford Green Hornet car. We're going to go and pick it up.

That was on a Friday and we got up there Saturday morning and went to the Citroï¿½n factory and it's all closed down. I said, "But you said I should come and pick up my car."

"L'usine c'est bien fermer, monsieur." The factory is closed. And then all of a sudden you hear the ding-dong, ding-dong. We were there on Saturday, the 11th of November of 1955, and of course the 11th of November is Armistice Day, and the French celebrate it, too. Everything was bien fermer. So what did we do? We go to the opera that night and see "Aida," have a good time and go back home, get the train.

The next weekend, I'd make the trip myself, get up there. Everything goes very well, except I get to the Vence, somewhere around Strasbourg. I get there just about three minutes after 12, Saturday. The French customs and border guys had done gone home for the weekend? What do you do? I've got to get all the way back down outside of Munich and get down the Bavarian Alps? What do you do?

Well, over there just across the border I see on the German side there's a fellow out there outside of his house, outside of his little office building, and he's working in his strawberry bed. So I go over there, and I'd had probably six weeks of German by then, maybe seven, not a whole lot.

I started talking with him about what he's doing and this and that, and we agreed that the French are kind of kooky people and they're too official and do this and that and the other thing. We're talking about his clamps and about the soil and all that, and pretty soon the guy says, "I can fix it up, no sweat."

But, again, because of knowing something about agriculture and talking with people, got it done, got out of there.

Q: How'd he get you across the border? How'd he do it?

SEVERIN: There was no one there that said that he couldn't.

Q: Okay.

SEVERIN: But it's, again, being able to find your way around and find something that we can talk about and something not only that we can talk about but something that they're interested in.

Q: Sure. Well, you spent that time in Germany. How long were you in Germany?

SEVERIN: I've had a grand time thinking about that while lying on this couch this past several weeks. Okay, so we finish up in Oberammergau just before Christmas in 1955. Barbara's sister and her husband, who was also in the 66 CIC unit, Roger Crossman. And Roger grew up in the same neighborhood as Barbara and her sister, Nona, there in Glendale, California. Well, Nona and Roger got married, or Roger was in the same CIC unit as I was in Offenbach, and he stayed there when I went off to Oberammergau.

Nona, Barbara's sister, came over and Roger and Nona got married. Well, he was still there in the same CIC unit and they rented a little house in Doernischheim, just outside of Frankfurt, in the direction of Hanau. And so we went up and they said that I was going to be stationed in Bremerhaven, but it was going to be a couple of weeks yet before I got there.

So we went up there and Roger and Nona had their nice little house, and Barb and Ken and I had a room in the landlord's house, and that was Kenneth's first Christmas. Somewhere around here I've got the Christmas card that we made that I had sent to my grandparents. It was a picture of a Christmas tree and a little youngster, just coming from under the Christmas tree and "Froehliche Weihnachten" and that.

It was a beautiful Christmas tree that we had and we had live candles on it. Of course, the tree had been soaked by the Army people and all that. So we were there and in January we went up to Bremerhaven. All right, well, there again we rented a couple of rooms from a family, from the Pust family, P-U-S-T Pust, Frau Pust, Grandma Pust and her daughter and son-in-law. And they had a great big, nice house, and we had our room, a big room, and then a living room that we pretty much had use of, and then we shared the kitchen.

Frau Pust really thought that Kenneth was grand, again, and she made sure that he spoke German before he spoke English, blond-haired, blue-eyed and that. And what was interesting was they were real big in the Fischereihafen in Bremerhaven and there's one big smokestack out there, Pust on it, and all that. What was interesting was that their house was directly across the street from the headquarters of the KPSS [Russian for the Communist Party of the Soviet Union], but no one ever bothered anybody.

So there we were and there were only five of us in the Bremerhaven field office. Let's see, there was Major Gilmore and I've forgotten the captain's name, and a warrant officer, a second lieutenant. There were six of us, seven of us, and Saul Keith, who was a master sergeant, and I, who was a little sergeant and Milo Zimmerman, who took care of the office. Then we had Gerhard, Gerhard, who took care of our motor pool things, took care of our cars, and he would go off once a month, at the end of the month, with all of the paperwork. He'd go off to the motor pool with all the paperwork that we'd fill out over the month and this and that, and he said, "Mein Kampf." But he really took care of us.

But what our job was, at that juncture, was interviewing refugees who wanted to emigrate to the United States, Flï¿½chtlinge fada, so we would go out and run background checks off people, and we have our field office there in Bremerhaven, but we'd always have to go to Hamburg to pick up our work and go out from Hamburg. And I know I'd be four, five, maybe six weeks at a time out without meeting anybody who spoke any English. I'd be in the British zone, and the Brits kept their folks in the Kaserne pretty well, and so that's basically what I did. And I remember one time we were up against it and they brought a young fellow in with a sergeant higher than I, and we were off and working outside of Braunschweig, right on the Glenza, and Randy, we each had our own cars to go wherever we had to go, wherever our cases took us. And Randy got out with some Brits one Saturday evening and tried to use his car to cut a tree down and it didn't work, and ended up in the hospital in Gifwarm.

Well, I was the only other Army in the area, and since we'd been working in the same general area, and Randy really hurt himself and he was in the hospital, German hospital Lebensgefï¿½hrlich war es [It was life-threatening]. And we had a big storm that went through just at that time and knocked down all the power lines. There was no communication. I couldn't get in touch with back with the home office, and so I had to make the decisions.

It all worked out, Randy got okay, got court martialed for being drunk and driving a car and wrecking the car, but it was really funny because we had this warrant officer, and this second lieutenant. I've forgotten which way it was, but one could speak German and couldn't understand it, and the other one could understand it, but couldn't speak it. So to run a case, you'd have to send them both to get it, one to send and one to receive.

But I'd be out, like I say, for several weeks, several weeks without seeing anybody who could speak any English. Some of the really tragic, tragic stuff, and I remember some of the folks in Yugoslavia, and sometimes you'd have to get somebody who could work as interpreter for you, because the other guy couldn't do it. And some of these big, old Army Kasernes where these families were being put up, and you see the little youngsters, and it was soup time and someone would run off with a bucket, come back with a bucket of soup.

The youngsters, you see them sit down with big plates like that, metal plates and spoons. I know there was one fellow from Yugoslavia, he showed me his stamp collection, just a marvelous stamp collection. He says, "Hey, I'll give this to you. I'll do anything if we could just get to America."

Some of the embarrassing things that you got into, going and doing these personal checks on people. It was a different world then in 1955 and 1956, and you asked these people, I remember asking this one little grandma, "Well, when were you married? Those were your children and so on? When were you married, and what was your husband's name. Bin nicht verheiratet [I'm not married].

That was embarrassing, then, and then you'd have to take their fingerprints. Ich bin kein Verbrecher [I'm not a criminal]. And to get some of the little old grandmas with real soft fingers, and they'd been cooking, anyway, to try to get them to

Q: Get a good print, yes.

SEVERIN: I've been over a lot of different ropes, but the big thing is working with folks and finding a way and getting it done. And, Allan, one of the things that I've thought about here last week, two weeks ago I suppose it was, we were in Bremerhaven in 1956. That's at the time when the Soviets were raising hell in Hungary.

In August of 1956, Barbara and Kenneth and I worked it out, and Bremerhaven, being a port, embarkation, debarkation, there were troops, there were troop ships that came in there. The troop ship would leave the United States, would stop in Southampton, England, U.K., offload folks, go on to Bremerhaven, finish offloading, start reloading, go back to Southampton, finish loading, go back to the United States. Well, being up there, and you get to know folks and how things are done, so, in August, we got onboard a ship that was going to go to Southampton, only partly loaded, and then finish loading.

Well, we went across to Southampton, got onboard, got on a train, went up to London. It was during the banking holiday weekend in August. It was grand, just grand. We spent a week up there. We had to be there a week before the next ship came in to offload and then go on back to Bremerhaven, but during that week we just had a grand time.

We'd never been to London before. We looked around, we stayed at the Regent Palace Hotel, down not too far from Piccadilly Circus. That was in August of '56, so Ken would have been not quite 18 months old, something around about like that, not a difficult child. Barbara being Barbara, we ended up one evening going to the Old Vic Theatre and saw George Bernhard Shaw play, "Caesar and Cleopatra". There's a fellow named Olivier that played the role that night.

But, to me, the most meaningful thing was the fact that the way that play was done that night, there as a prologue by Ra, and given the fact that Hungary, Budapest, was just falling apart, the Soviets were there. Hey, Severin, you're due to leave, to get out of the Army to go home in December, are you going to be able to do it? What's the situation. That prologue by Ra was as if it had been written that afternoon, as if it had been written that afternoon about the world situation and the way that I was looking at it, the way it could affect me.

And we went to the Design Centre, which is just at about 26 Haymarket Street, just above 28 Haymarket, where the International Wheat Council used to be located. We went to the Design Centre and got some lovely lead crystal, whiskey glasses and pitchers. While I was lying here a couple of weeks ago I was enjoying some of that, the little thistles of Glenfiddich, but those are the kinds of things.

And then it was probably around about the 20th of December, Barb and Ken and I got onboard ship and Barb was pregnant again, and we were onboard the ship at Christmas, in the North Atlantic. And we had a little bit of a harness for Ken, with a lead on it, so that he didn't have to get his arm pulled out of his socket and we didn't have to go way down, give him a little bit of freedom to run. But we were onboard ship the last week of December as we came back to the United States.

And it was on December the 31st of 1956 that I got a paper signed discharging me from active service, December the 31st. The paper was signed by Major Liberty. His name was Liberty and he was a major.

Q: Okay.

SEVERIN: There are some things that are unforgettable.

Q: All right, there was an omen there.

SEVERIN: There was something there. So we whipped out across country and I started school at Stanford very soon thereafter in time for the second quarter, something like that, January of 1957 and just had a good time there at Stanford. And I remember the people. Karl Brandt was my main man, Dr. Bennett, Merrill K. Bennett, who was the director of the Food Research Institute at the time. The Food Research Institute has been done away with there at Stanford, because there just wasn't enough in it. They don't have graduate students anyway, and there were maybe six, maybe eight of us, when I was there.

Dr. Bennett wrote that wonderful book, "World's Food," and then I did some work for Mr. Wickheiser, and I've forgotten the other fellow I did a lot of work for, East African agriculture. The lady who taught us to write was Louise Pieffer. You had to draft your paper, give her a draft of the outline of the paper, then you went and talked with her about it, then you went ahead and you drafted the paper. You brought it back to her and then she'd look at it, and then you'd look at it again. And then, finally, after about four goes you'd have a paper acceptable to her.

And then another thing that I'll never, ever forget was I had a course in commodity analysis by Cherington Farnsworth, Mrs. Farnsworth. She was tougher than tough, but that one course in commodity analysis would be with you forever in a very positive way. We used the wheat studies, was what we did our commodity analysis about, and so good.

But I did a lot of work with Dr. Brandt, and just having come back from Germany, there was an affinity there, anyway. I had a couple of courses from him, Products Produced in Agriculture and something else. And we went on field trips, and he said, "We're going to leave here at 7 o'clock on Saturday morning and you better there at 7 o'clock on Saturday morning. Otherwise all you'd see would be taillights in the distance."

When I left there in 1958, when I got my master's degree, the next time I saw Dr. Brandt was here in the Cosmos Club. He had been made a member of the Council of Economic Advisors by a fellow by the name of Eisenhower, and Dr. Brandt called and he said, "I'll have another fellow here I'd like for you and Barbara to meet." His name was John Schnittker.

Dr. Brandt and I, we got on so well, and of course, again, the blond-headed, blue-eyed boy, and Dr. Brandt and his wife had four boys. I'd always come home from school and, "Kenneth, I saw Dr. Brandt today." And I said, "Dr. Brandt, wie gehts." And we would talk.

So, one day, one Saturday or something, I went in there and Dr. Brandt was in there. I said, "Kenneth, this is Dr. Brandt." And Kenneth says, "Dr. Brandt, wie gehts." And then I showed something. I said, "Kenneth, do you remember anything about the Volkswagen." He says, "Oh, Dr. Brandt, fow vay, das bedeutet Volkswagen [VW, that means Volkswagen].

And Dr. Brandt got Kenneth on his knee and they were talking, and Dr. Brandt would put a piece of paper on a fingernail and said, "Es gibt zwei Tauben und sie sind weggeflogen." [There are two doves, and they have flown away]. And just so wonderful, and lived at Stanford Village while we were there. It was an old Army hospital and the folks next door were mopping their floor, you knew it, because the water came under the wall. It was very, very rudimentary, but there was a place back down the way there where we could have a garden and Kenneth and I had a garden, and that's where he learned a lot about gardening, about placing the tomato in the bucket.

We just had such a good time, and that was meaningful, too, because that was in 1957 and 1958, and I earned my money there. I worked for Stanford Research Institute in the personnel department, doing personnel interviews on telephone, that kind of stuff, kind of knew how to do it. Then I drove a VW for Monte something, but I ran a pharmaceutical delivery for this fellow. The service center worked for him, and picked up prescriptions at the different drug stores and delivered them to the homes.

But in late October 1957, I studied and I made good grades at Stanford. I made good grades at Stanford. I had heard there was something called Sputnik, and I walked out of our little place early, early one morning, 3:30, 4 o'clock. I had heard it over the radio when I was driving the VW, delivering prescriptions and that, but that was my first experience with Sputnik.

People use the word awesome. They don't know what they're talking about. It's a misused term, and so often it relates to, the way it's used, it relates to some of these overpaid athletes. But, for me, awesome would be like when you fly from Salt Lake City into southern California and you fly over those high desert mountains. That's awesome.

But one time I was up in Alaska, visiting Kenneth, and it was in February or March, and we were having dinner and someone telephoned. "Hey, Ken, the lights are working," meaning the aurora. So we went out and took a look, stood, looking to the north. Yes, the lights were working, the green lights were working. The aurora was coming out. They weren't all that bright. Why? Because over my right shoulder there was a full moon, and that was diluting the light, the density and the brilliance of the light.

And, at the same time, you looked out there and you could see the Big Dipper and the North Star, all of that. And, just at that instant, a sputnik went over. I saw all of that without moving my feet, really, without turning my body. Now, that's awesome.

Q: That's awesome.

SEVERIN: That's awesome. So, anyway, finished up out there at Stanford in June of '58 and the USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] makes me the best offer.

Q: How did you get in touch with USDA? How did that work, that they found you or if you found them?

SEVERIN: Well, they were just out going around, looking for agricultural economists, as it were.

Q: Specifically, FAS [Foreign Agricultural Service] or USDA?

SEVERIN: It was ERS [Economic Research Service].

Q: ERS was looking, okay, because ERS wasn't created until '61.

SEVERIN: Well, OFAR [Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations] or whoever.

Q: Oh, OFAR. It must have been FAS, because FAS was in existence then.

SEVERIN: Whatever it was, but that's how I got in touch witand one of the men who was on the staff there, Vladimir P. Timoshenko, knew a lot about sugar.

Q: On staff where?

SEVERIN: Food Research Institute.

Q: At Stanford.

SEVERIN: At Stanford, and he would talk about the developing countries, and, anyway, he was a sugar expert. Well, after leaving Stanford and getting my master's degree there from the Food Research Institute in June of 1958, Barbara and Kenneth and I in our little Citroï¿½n made our way across to Washington, D.C., where I went with USDA. Oh, goodness, the fond memories I have of working there with Dr. Volin. [Dr. Lazar Volin, regional analyst for the Soviet Union in FAS 1930-1961, then in ERS 1961 until retirement, and author of "A Century of Russian Agriculture"]. What a grand fellow, what a grand gentleman he was. And then a little later, Quentin West came along. I've forgotten exactly the title or the name of the organization and that.

But while there with Dr. Volin in that shop, Stan Brown and Don Krisler and Mil Davis, and I was doing some work on East European agriculture, and at the same time seeing the importance of the Soviet Union and, particularly, having become interested in it because of Dr. Volin, and that all he had done and was doing. I started learning to read some Russian and learned to read Sel'skaya zhizn' and that. And, lo and behold, early part of 1963, I was asked whether I would be interested in going to Moscow as the assistant agricultural attachï¿½ because the fellow who had been there in that position, Rod Carlson, had been asked by the Soviets to kindly leave.

So in June of 196wait, let me back up just a second. Like I say, I'd begun to learn to read some Russian, but if I was going to be over there, I needed to be able to speak a little bit of it. And so while there wasn't a lot of time for it, I had maybe one month of Russian language, conversational, instruction. Anyway, in June of 1963, early June of 1963, Barbara, Kenneth and Bailey and I showed up over there.

Our son, Ken, was eight years old, and Bailey was an 11-week-old bird dog, German short-haired pointer puppy. And, in fact, his momma, Keck, was already in whelp at the time that we had been asked whether we wanted to go to Moscow. And Bailey was the last of the litter to go, so what the heck, why not? And it was a good thing to do. What great icebreakers Kenneth and Bailey turned out to be.

We rented our house in Vienna and Charlie, Barbara, the fellow who ran the local Esso station bought our old 1956 Chevy station wagon. He took us down to National Airport, Kenneth, Bailey, Barb and I. We got on the airplane that morning and flew up to Idlewild. Bailey was in his pet pack, as it were, so we left him there because, not knowing what the Soviets were going to be doing to us, and that was 1963, Cold War times, didn't know what all we might be subjected to.

We had a day there in New York City, so we went to the United Nations and we certainly went off to the Statue of Liberty, Kenneth, Barbara and I. We got back to the airport late that afternoon, early evening, and went to check on Bailey, and we saw his pet pack was opened. Where is the puppy?

Looked up on the desk there, and someone had taken the pup and put his coat out on the desk there and Bailey was lying up there, sleeping. So, that evening, Barb and Ken and Bailey and I got on Pan Am, first class. That's the way to go, Bailey in his pet pack under our seat. And we took off and we flew and landed in Stockholm, Oslo, the next morning. I've forgotten which and, anyway, just to refuel.

So I took Bailey outside and walked him around the airplane and he emptied out and we got back on the airplane, flew on to Helsinki, not very far away. And then Barb and Ken and I and Bailey spent a couple of days there in Helsinki. We had a nice hotel, gratefully just across the street from a park.

So I would get up quietly in the morning, get dressed. Then I'd wake Bailey up and pick him up, get him across the street, into the park, before he was permitted to put his feet down. Then, in Helsinki, we got onboard a train and, as you know, the rail line between Helsinki and Leningrad, or the Soviet border, Russian border, is kind of crooked and back and forth for one reason. But we got on over there and went straight on into Moscow and went to the Leningradskiy vokzal [Leningrad Railstation in Moscow, the terminus for trains from Leningrad - now St. Petersburg]. And Bill Horbaly was there to meet us, and maybe he was a little bit surprised to see Bailey, but, the heck, I had a diplomatic passport. Doesn't everybody travel with a bird dog puppy, as well as family?

So we went on and got ensconced in the third-floor apartment of the embassy building and we were on the third floor and there was a balcony off Kenneth's bedroom. And that balcony, our apartment was right over what was the exit. There was one way into the embassy compound and one way out. Our apartment was right over the exit way. It was nice to have that balcony there off Kenneth's bedroom and, yes, we grew a few Kentucky wonder beans and that and it was just a nice place to have some light.

And, incidentally, it was in probably November of 1964, shortly before we left there, that was the only demonstration outside the embassy that there was while we were there, and an ink bottle was thrown through one of the windows in Kenneth's bedroom, just off that balcony. We'd been warned that there was going to be the demonstration, and it was because the Soviets were not happy with some action that the United States was taking in the Congo, if I remember correctly.

But that balcony, too, was also interesting, because Kenneth went to Soviet public school. P.S. 69 is the elementary school, the grammar school, just down the street on the right-hand side, as you come out of Spaso House. But Kenneth would come on home and maybe some of his little Soviet classmates would be with him, and he needed to get something to them, so he would go up and write a note or whatever it was and fold up a piece of paper, airplane, and fly it off the balcony there, and the militiamen would wonder what was going on with those youngsters doing that.

And in this same vein, toKenneth was a great icebreaker in that regard, as I've said, and so was Bailey, but Bailey was more than that in some regards, because Bailey had very good ears and our apartment had parquet flooring. And Bailey would sometimes sit around and cock his head, what am I hearing, what am I hearing? Like the RCA Victor dog, Nipper. He was hearing things and, of course, it was Cold War times and so we were very circumspect about what we said there in the embassy, anywhere, anywhere, because you just didn't know what was being picked up.

We saw the reason, certainly, for having stainless steel sinks. You go ahead and write out what you need to say to your wife or to whomever and burn it in the sink. But, anyway, we got there in June of 1963 and almost immediately after we got there, it was one of the highlights, almost immediately it wal'm sure not later than the end of Junwe showed up there, but Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, and his entourage, Dorothy Jacobson, who was his assistant secretary, a lady who also came from Minnesota, as Mr. Freeman did, and Dr. Volin. Grand to see him, not only again, but kind of an old stomping grounds. And then there were Gene Olson and Jack McDonald, too, who was a speechwriter.

I later on saw Jack a long time afterwards in Brazil, where he was the ag attachï¿½ in Rio. But, anyway, they came and of course Bill Horbaly was very busy taking care of them and he had a dinner party, I remember one evening, for the secretary. That was fine, because that meant that Barbara and I were able to take care of our good friend Dr. Volin and Dorothy Jacobson and Gene Olson and Jack McDonald.

But that was a good time, and then, after the secretary lefand just for context here, you may remember that it was Orville Freeman who made the nominating speech for John Kennedy to become President of the United States. There was some banter going back, that Mr. Freeman, who had been in the Marine Corps in World War II and had had part of has jaw shot away. I saw him lots of times thereafter, and what a nice fellow he was, but, anyway, there was some banter going back and forth that in thanks for and in return for that nominating speech, what job would you like within the administration? "Anything except being Secretary of Agriculture," which is where he showed up, of course.

And we had not been in Moscow but a couple of days, until Barbara developed a bit of a tooth problem, and we had it checked out, dentally and all the rest of that before we left, but she developed a tooth problem. Well, what do you know? She got a ride back to the United States on a U.S. Air Force. And so she was able to go back to the United States, go to our local dentist here. It was still Dr. Bosco in Vienna, and get it taken care of and she was back within three days. Well, how did she do that?

Well, an airplane had come in, brought at whole slug of United States senators, including Hubert Humphrey. They came over for the signing of the Test Ban Treaty. Then the airplane came back a few days later to take them home, so Barb hitchhiked a ride back and forth, but it was the signing of the Test Ban Treaty.

One of the fellows, one of the State Department officers, I've forgotten his name, but Bob something. I can still see him, but, anyway, he was the one who escorted Mr. Humphrey and he said it was kind of embarrassing, because Mr. Humphrey would walk up to some Soviet military guy, "Hey, what are you going to do? Y'know, we just signed the Test Ban Treaty. You're going to be out of a job. What are you going to be doing?" But the brashest of the American politicians, all right, fine. That was one of the things that happened early on.

And then, two, you remember what the ambassador's 4th of July parties are. Well, we had a group of veterinarians there on the 4th of July of 1963. We had the head of thl've forgotten his name, but he was head of Communicable Diseases Center in Atlanta. He was head of the delegation. Dunn, Dr. Dunn, I believe he was head of the vet school in Pennsylvania and then we had the head of the vet school from Illinois, and then there was somebody else from the Communicable Diseases Center who spoke Russian.

But, anyway, those four fellows were there, and three high-powered vets. And so after the 4th of July party, Ambassador Kohler, Foy Kohler, at his place there, Spaso House, we all had tired feet. So we thought that the fellows should be taken care of. I don't think Horbaly was there. Otherwise, I couldn't have gotten away with it, I reckon.

But, anyway, those four fellows all came to our apartment. We took our shoes off, sat down, put our feet up. Well, Bailey at that juncture, Bailey was whelped in March, I believe it was, so Bailey was about four months old and he needed his shots and inoculations and that, and I had all the material there.

So here it is, here are these high-flown vets and we get ahold of Bailey and get him down and these high-flown vets give Bailey his shots. We had a grand time. We just had a grand time, and, again, it's getting along with people. It's working with them and being not only a little bit knowledgeable of what they're about and what they're interested in, but having a sincere appreciation for it.

Q: There are a couple of things I'd like you to touch on, one of which gets into a little bit of that, and one of which is maybe a little bit more just your historical perspective. The first is crop travel, because agricultural officers typically do more travel out of Moscow and out of the city than other sections of the embassy. And if you could talk a little bit about what it was like doing crop travel in the Soviet Union back in the '60s, during the Cold War, with the surveillance that you were under and what the ground rules were and just your perspective on that.

And then the other thing, of course, is 1964, that was a landmark year because that was the year the Soviets did their massive grain imports.

SEVERIN: No, '63.

Q: Sixty-three, okay, in '63. It was '64 that Khrushchev was thrown out of office for having...

SEVERIN: He made a mistake. He went on vacation down to the Black Sea.

Q: So if you could talk a little bit about both of those.

SEVERIN: Sure. I'll get into it a little bit by the next thing I was going to say, is that it was August and September, I suppose, soon after we had gotten there in June, that I went off for just about a full month on a trip with Floyd Domonie, who was at that time commissioner of the Bureau of Land Reclamation. I think that's the right name, but he was head of it, and he came over with four or five fellows, spent about a month.

And, yes, we want to Tashkent, we went to Andizhan, the Fergana Valley, to Osh and to Baku and through the Absheron Peninsula. Then we went to Yerevan, and we drove from Yerevan, had a fantastic picnic organized by Minister of Irrigation Bagramyan there in Armenia and then drove from there over the mountains to Tbilisi, this whole group. And we were accompanied by a fellow, Sam Ofengenden, and another irrigation engineer, Lyudmila Moreno, and we were taken well care of. But that was my first trip outside, as it were, and so I saw more agriculture, certainly all down in the area that needed to be irrigated and reclamated and that.

But one of the interesting things about this is while we were in Yerevan, one of the fellows, one of the locals, he was editor of their newspaper, "Kommunist", Eduard. Some way, we got a little bit acquainted. In November, he came up to Moscow and got in touch with me and Kenneth and I took him to a hockey match one evening, and we took him back to his hotel, the Praga. And then we came back to the embassy, and as we came in, Harriet, I think, was her first name, Harriett Scott, the air attachï¿½'s wife, came out. And she said, "Keith, Keith, have you heard? Have you heard? President Kennedy's been shot."

When all that took place, Kenneth and I were out with Eduard from Yerevan. And then later on, Ken and Barb and another lady from the embassy took a trip and they went through Yerevan and around a couple of places and Eduard took good care of them.

But on this thing of crop travel, it really didn't exist, and particularly relative to what can be done today, it really did not exist in the '60s, or when I was there. Because, in order to go anywhere, to make any kind of a trip, you had to have permission from the Ministry of Agriculture. You had to have an appointment wherever it was you were going to go. You had to have hotel reservation to wherever it was you were going to go, and you had to have your travel reservations, whether on train or on airplane. And if you didn't have any one of those, you were shot down, or you could have 'em, have your suitcase and going out the door, telephone rings, "Hey, no more seats on that flight," so you stayed at home.

If you traveled anywhere by vehicle, yes, you had to have where you were going, who you were going to see, where you were going to stay. And then, if you're driving a vehicle, what vehicle it is, what's the license number, who's going to be traveling with you. So you were completely at their drop-of-the-hat mercy in any one of those things.

There was no crop travel, as such, really. The way that we got our information, every day we got Sel'skaya zhizn', Pravda, Izvestia, and then the newspapers from each one of the republics. And if you read one of those good, you didn't have to read the rest of them. You had to have the match flights. They were absolute duplicates as it were. So that was our primary source of information.

But, now, having said that, I was on very good terms with people in the embassy in other departments, and particularly the military. If they were going to go somewhere, they'd say, "Keith, we're going to go someplace, wherever it happened to be. What is it that we ought to see? What is it that you're looking for?" And they'd come back and tell me what's out there now, and what would be different. And, by the same token, hey, we all work for Uncle Sam, if I were going to go somewhere, "I'm going to go somewhere, is there anything I need to be particularly attentive about?"

And that made a big difference, and I'll never forget one night, when there as a party at Spaso House and Jimmy Shapiro, Commander Shapiro's wife, and he later on was head of Naval Intelligence. Anyway, she came up to him when we were talking and she said something about, well, you fellows in the State Department. I said, "I'm not State Department." She said, "I've been wondering why you're so different. I've been wondering why you were so different."

The fellow who was going around with Hubert Humphrey was Bob Bragdon. I was different, and there's another thing, too, that fits this whole picture, is that while we were there, our ambassador was Foy Kohler and Mrs. Kohler, and they liked us. They liked the Severins a whole lot, and when we were getting ready to go home, and it was less than a two-year assignment because we'd come in to fill in for the tail end of Rod Carlson and that, and one day I was going across the courtyard and I heard, "Keith, Keith."

I looked and Mrs. Kohler was in the car and she said, "Come here, come here." She said, "What's this I hear about you and Barbara going? You can't be doing that. You can't leave us."

But the Kohlers expected you to work, and there's a reception and you're going to be there and I don't want to see one of you talking with another American or English-speaking person. You will work. It was done in a good kind of a way and at the time that we were there, the list of officers in the embassy was on the front of a legal-size sheet of paper.

We parked our American car in the embassy. That's how few of us that there were there, and we all got along so doggone well. Bill Van Meter, who was in the Air office, a Lieutenant Colonel, and we got to know him and Julie quite well, and we stayed with them later on, in Sofia, when he was a military attachï¿½ there, but Bill Van Meter and Adolph "Spike" Dubs and I. You had to make your own fun, as it were.

We would have popcorn popping contests. We'd start off with the same number of kernels in the pot and get them popped and how few kernels you'd have left. Spike , sometimes I'd run into him in the middle of the night, down out back, washing the car as the chauffeurs in the car were taken care of. The folks who took care of the car, they were done and gone home and all the embassy cars were cleaned up, and so we'd be down there, cleaning up our own.

Spike was such a wonderful, wonderful man, and he was our ambassador in Kabul. He was assassinated down there, just a grand guy. And another thing I'll remember about him, too, was later on, probably in 1975, maybe '76, Roger Neetz was the attachï¿½ then, whenever that was, but under one of the exchange teams that went over, one of the teams that went over o the exchange agreement, they were going to send us off somewhere that made absolutely no sense at all. And so Spike Dubs, who was acting DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission] at the time, I believe, and he went with me and pounded the table with Runov and didn't do any good. [Boris Aleksandrovich Runov, former deputy minister of agriculture of the Soviet Union, who spoke fluent English as a consequence of having studied at Iowa State University following World War II, and who was the youngest Hero of the Soviet Union to come out of World War II.]

Then that night, I was there witI don't know if Art Shaw was along or not, and then there was a fellow, McDonald, from North Dakota. I'd gone over with an inkling that they were not going to let us go wherever we wanted to go. It wasn't Art Shaw. It was Wes Tausig from North Dakota.

I had an inkling that they were going to try to shoot us down and send us someplace we didn't want to go. They never did really receive the team officially, and I'd gone over with the permission to bring the team home, if I thought that that was the best thing to do. Anyway, that evening, after Spike Dubs and I had been talking with Runov. There was a reception at Spaso [Spaso House, the American Ambassador's official residence in Moscow] and the military guys said, "Hey, we're hearing you may be taking our team home. That's good."

The State Department were saying, "Hey, you can't take the team home, that doesn't do us any good with the Soviet relations." Ricki Neetz, Roger's wife, had chewed me out like anything, "You're spoiling our relationships with the Soviets and that. You can't do it." Anyway, we brought the team home. Hell with them.

Q: Well, could you talk a little bil want to get into the exchanges, the post-1972 era, at some point, which is when the agreement was signed on exchanges, so I'd like to get into that. But, before we go to that, if we could talk about '63.

SEVERIN: Yes, well, that's exactly what I was thinking. Well, another highlight in 1963, and it was a fantastic one that carried over. The effects of it carried over. Nineteen-sixty-three, the Soviets had a real crop bust and they came to the United States and I've forgotten how much they bought, but I remember the S.S. Manhattan put into Odessa. I think the Manhattan carried 108,000, 109,000 tons of grain. It was immense, just a huge, huge thing, and real big and that whole operation was a Michel Fribourg [Michel Fribourg was chairman of Continental Grain at the time].

Michel Fribourg was the honcho for cotton and grain and exports. What a nice fellow he was, the chairman exports. I've forgotten his first name, Matveyev, but big parties and priyoms [receptions] and that there at the National Hotel. The fact that the Soviets came into the market that year, and particularly to the extent that they came into the market that year, just put the international grain trade right on its ears.

If I remember correctly, that because of the fact that the Soviets were in as buyers that year that the grain import food bill for the U.K. was up something like 20 pence per capita, so that was a huge unexpected outlay that the U.K. had to make to feed its people. As a consequence of that, everybody was really wanting to know, what's going to happen next year? Are we going to have another crop bust next year? What's going to happen? What's going to happen?

Well, as it turns out, Horbaly had gone home. Brice Meeker, who was to succeed him, was not there yet. Stan Brown was sent in on a very temporary basis, but basically Keith Severin was the only guy in Moscow, Westerner in Moscow, who knew anything at all about agriculture.

I was on the ground a lot. I was on the trip a lot. The Canadians did not have their ag attachï¿½ in there anymore, so they sent Fred Hillhouse in, who was their man from Bonn. I learned a lot from Fred, traveled with Fred a lot. I'll never forget, we were somewhere where I talked about us Americans, or about the Americans, and Fred said, "Hey, I'm an American, too. I come from North America." But, anyway, the Canadians sent Fred Hillhouse in, and, needless to say, the Brits were there, too.

Ted Orchard came in and he was from their INR [State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research] or whatever it is, but, anyway, I traveled with Ted and that was the first time I was ever in Barnaul. We got on out there and it was rainy and it was probably in September, and things were pretty rudimentary and Ted was tired and he'd gone off to his little cubicle, as it were, and I stayed in my little room, which had just some sheets drawn around and the lady came to me and she said, "What do you want to eat?" And I said, "Well, if one is in Siberia, you're supposed to eat pelmeni."

She said, "Fine, I'll call you." So that evening I had about two dozen svezhiye pel'meni, ochen' vkusno bylo. [fresh pel'meni, it was very tasty] And I had music, too. They had taped some music off I suppose Voice of America and it was a tape. It would run and it would get through it. It would start over again and start over again. But that was my first trip to Barnaul.

Brice Meeker came in sometime late, I've forgotten exactly when, and I took Brice on his first road trip and we wenl remember we got to Donetsk, and we were driving. We were driving. We were in Donetsk at the time of the world football match, and they took us in the back of one of the big, fancy, just-for-us-only restaurants and we watched the world football match there.

And it must have been before went Odessa, that the car broke down. We were driving a Ford and the car broke down in Rostov, and took it to the same checkpoint that I'd been to in late April, when the car had broken down. I remember the mechanic there said, "Hey, I've seen two of your Fords now. Next time, bring me a Lincoln."

But, anyway, Brice and I, we'd gone to Odessa and we put the car onboard ship, the Abkhazia, and the ship would normally have put in at Sevastopol, but that being a big naval base and that, it anchored some ways out and so they had to lighter the regular passengers and that.

But, anyway, we got our car off board at Yalta, and then we went from Yalta on back up to Moscow. And kind of in the same vein, Dave Schoonover came over to succeed me and I took Dave on his first trip. I will never forget that. We went out to Tselinograd and went up to Shortandy and visited with Barayev. But Dave had a lot to learn, because he had more experience at being treated well by the Russians.

Dave didn't have much experience and didn't take to it too well. I'll never forget that. We were going along and he had his head stuck out the window. And then, also, in 1964, like I said, the Canadian was there, the Brit was there, and that was the year that Ed Jaenke came over, Bill Starkey and Jianyway, from AMS [Agricultural Marketing Service] and Roland Blue, Shorty Blue, who was an assistant administrator.

Ed was associate administrator. Ed was associate administrator in charge of production policy for grains and soybeans at that juncture. And I'll never forget, they would not let me travel with Ed and his group.

Q: They being who, the Soviets?

SEVERIN: The Soviets would not. And Stan was there at the beginning of their trip. I want to say Stan Brown was there, because when the crew came in, when those four fellows came in, we took them. They were put up at the Ostankino Hotel. And it was so funny, because all those fellows were tall, big guys, and as we were taking them into dinner that evening, the Russian band there played "When the Saints Go Marching In." What a hoot.

The Soviets would not let me travel with Ed and his crew, and they came through Moscow a time or two, so I took them their mail and I picked up stuff that they had. There was a little short gal who was their interpreter, and she wasn't interpreting. My Russian, it's never been all that great, but I know a little bit, but she wasn't giving them the straight line on some stuff.

I'll never forget the last meeting that they had, and they were the last group of foreigners to come in, and so a big, long table and of course the Americans were always put on the side of the table that had to face the light and that. Ed said that they'd been traveling and they'd seen this and that and they were curious what the prospects were for the 1964 crop. I don't know who it was that they were meeting with, but they said, "Well, we don't count our chickens before they hatch, and we really don't what it's going to be." So Ed said, "You don't count your chickens before they hatch."

"No." He said, "Well, your 1963 chickens hatched a long time ago. What was the size of your crop then?" And the Soviet responded, "It was such a bad crop, we're embarrassed about it. We don't talk about it yet."

At that juncture, Ed got up from his side of the table, thump, thump, thump, thump, thump, all the way around to the other side, and the fellow kind of looked it and Ed said, "Thank you, that's the first honest answer I've heard since we've been here." And that was I think on September the 14th of 1964. The reason I remember that date is because September the 14th is Ed's birthday, the same date as my brother Kenneth, who was killed in the airplane crash.

Ed likes martinis, so we were going to give him a good going away party and the Minsk had just opened up there on Gorky Street. It was the place to go, so we went over there and I took two big thermoses of honest-to-God martinis over to Jaenke's birthday party. So, as I said, I got along very well with Ed Jaenke and it wasn't long after I came back from Moscow that Ed had me working in ASCS [Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service]. And ostensibly I was on Shorty Blue, who was commodity operations. Ostensibly, I was working for him, but Ed had a private line from his desk to my desk.

And then, too, just another thing about when we moved here into this house on September the 1st of 1970, who was it that helped us move out of our house from Vienna, here, spent all day helping us move? It was Ed Jaenke.

Q: Coming back before you left Moscow, you were there for the transition from the Khrushchev era to the Brezhnev era. That would have happened in '64. Were you there when the Central Committee plenum took place and Khrushchev was officially retired and Brezhnev came in? Or were you already gone by that time?

SEVERIN: Pretty well gone, because, you see, he got the boot in November. We left on the 1st of December.

Q: So you were pretty much on the way out at that point.

SEVERIN: We were on the way out. And at that juncture, too, going back about crop travel and how we learned things, one of the big jobs, of course, was the food supply. And so you went to the collective farm market and to the state stores. I would always try to do it on Sunday morning or Wednesday afternoon, do it at the same time so as to get some degree of measure in there. What is the supply? What is the quantity? We would always go and we'd take some American newspaper because you always had to wrap your own stuff.

You only needed two sheets to wrap it in, but you'd leave the rest of the paper there. "Oh, those are good looking potatoes. Where did they come from? Well, what else is going on?" You learned things, and Kenneth was a great help in that regard because he went to the same barber as the other little Soviet boys and wore the same uniform. He worked up and he had his own contact, particularly in the dairy sections. He would help me remember prices and get prices.

It was as much fun as it was work, but, again, as I put it, it's howdy-doing the folks. It's learning something about them and there were things that happened, so much fun. And Horbaly was gone, clearly, because John Kenneth Galbraith, who was the U.S. ambassador to India at the time was coming through, and he was there.

Ambassador Kohler invited him to lunch, and Mr. Obolenskiy, who was head of agricultural economics at the time and his perevodchik [interpreter], Viktor, Viktor Nazarenko. [Viktor Nazarenko was later scientific secretary of the All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VASKhNiL)].

Q: Who is still alive and living in Moscow. Viktor Nazarenko is still around in Moscow.

SEVERIN: And checking on his right bottle of Tsinandali and all that stuff. I was there. So there were the five of us for lunch at Spaso, and Severin sometimes doesn't show proper judgment, I suppose. But I just had been to the ryno[market] that morning. I said, oh, I noticed something really very interesting. This morning, I was at the collective farm market and there were some people from Central Asia there, and they had some really lovely strawberries, a very interesting variety of strawberries. Kakoy sort? Chemodanchik.

"What variety of strawberries were they?" Suitcase. That's the way they were brought up from down there, 15 rubles to get there, round-trip ticket, and Nazarenko didn't think that was too funny.

Q: He wouldn't have.

SEVERIN: But, again, you have some fun along the way and you keep your eyes open. Our big burden for Horbaly and me, for our office, was of course, and it's not all that much different, I suppose, is that the econ section, State econ section, thought that they ran the ag section. They know more about it and you can't write anything unless we okay it and all the rest of that.

Well, our big job was having a weekly input to the weekly economic report. So you'd read, you'd talk to, you'd find out what you could and you had your contribution to the weekly economic report. One fellow that was there in the embassy, I've forgotten. He was either the DCM or the acting DCM, I suppose, was Jack Sweeney, or McSweeney, and he was horrible. He was horrible.

I think he had a bulldog and Ken Kurst, they had a bulldog, and Bailey, we had our dogs. But Sweeney, or McSweeney, was absolutely horrible. We had a wonderful DCM later on, Walter Stoessel. He was so good, Walter and Maryanne, his wife, just good folks. And Mac Toon was head of the political section part of the time we were there. [Both Walter Stoessel and Malcolm Toon later served as U.S. Ambassadors to the Soviet Union.]

I had a wonderful time traveling with some of the young State Department fellows, Peter Bridges, who later went. And then right after Kennedy was killed, I had a good trip down to Kharkov then on to Kishinev with Roger Kirk, and his father had been ambassador there, went over Red Square. And Roger's son was also an Alan Kirk, and Peter Bridges, little guy.

Peter Bridges had a son, also, and he was about the same age as Ken, and he was the one who came running across the courtyard, I suppose it was in January of 1964, just after Barb and Ken and I had come back from going off for a Christmas holiday in Switzerland with Barbara's family. But the little Bridges guy came running across the courtyard, "Ken, Ken, did you hear? Did you hear? Bailey ate the Marines' Christmas turkey."

The Marines had said, when they were up on the sixth floor on the north wing there, they said they'd take care of Bailey. I said, "You know he's a puppy. I wouldn't trust him." Well, Buck had roasted the turkey and left it out to cool while they went to have a drink and came back and Bailey...

Q: Helped himself.

SEVERIN: But Bailey was so good and Ken and I, we would take Bailey for a walk, and we'd be somewhere over yonder. We were tailed everywhere we went, and Bailey would, sniff, "Hey, buddy, what you're doing here? You're normally guarding the gate at the embassy. Get away, get away, get away."

Q: So he made your tail all the time.

SEVERIN: And the Marines one time took Bailey out and there was some grandma there and had a youngster and the youngster came up to Bailey and the youngster had an ice cream cone. The youngster came up to Bailey and Bailey ate it.

But they were big icebreakers, those two. And Kenneth went to P.S. 69, as I say, went in the mornings from eight until noon or eight until 12:30, or something. Well, the embassy, we were closed on Wednesday afternoon, and that was time that Kenneth and I had a wonderful time. We'd take a walk somewhere, or we would take the tramvay [Tram, the tracked trolley car used widely for public transportation in Soviet and Russian cities.] somewhere and walk back. We would go somewhere, just poke around, Ken and I, and that, plus going to the collective farm markets, we just had a grand time.

Q: Why was the embassy closed on Wednesday afternoons?

SEVERIN: Well, we were open Saturday morning, so we closed Wednesday afternoons.

Q: Why were you open on Saturday mornings?

SEVERIN: Because we were closed Wednesday afternoon.

Q: I see. We don't operate that way anymore.

SEVERIN: And another thing, too, about Bailey as an icebreaker, where the embassy is located now, that was just a big vacant lot, and that's where the people in that area got together every evening to let their dogs run and jump and play and exercise. And Bailey and I were a part of that crowd. It was just another way of getting to know the folks.

After I'd been gone from that long trip in September, I came back, I was somewhere across town, and a lady says, "You've been gone, mister, you've been gone. Who's been taking care of your puppy?" But those two were grand icebreakers, Kenneth and Bailey.

Q: Well, you came back from Moscow and you went to work for ASCS, and you worked for ASCS for a while. But at some point, you did come over to the Foreign Agricultural Service. What was the career progression then, and what were you working on? What were the issues you were working on? Because you eventually ended up being the resident Sovietologist at USDA. And when I met you, when I came onboard in '82, you were already the grand old man of Soviet agriculture and the go-to person on the Russian grain crop, Soviet grain crop and anything having to do with the Soviet Union.

Obviously, you slid into that niche somehow. Was it conscious, was it just happenstance? How did it happen?

SEVERIN: It just happened. I was with ASCS for a while, and I was helping them. And, actually, one of my jobs was to attend Ray Ioanes's staff meeting, to be aware of what FAS was doing in terms of export, export policy, projections and things like that. Then I would bring that back to ASCS. At the same time, Ioanes knew me, and I could participate in his staff meeting.

I was officed with Arnold Garthoff and Francis Hankes. Francis Hankes, Mr. Hankes, was as lawyer and he was one of the lawyers on the CCC, Commodity Credit Corporation. Well, Art Garthoff, Al Garthoff, G-A-R-T-H-O-F-F, and he has a son or a couple of sons, that are real big in Soviet studies and Johns Hopkins and stuff like that. I think one of them may even be an ambassador somewhere. But, anyway, Al Garthoff, just a real gentleman, and he was the U.S. main connection and had been, I think, chairman of the International Wheat Council at one time.

So I was there with them and I was starting to get to know more about wheat from that point of view, international agreements and things like that, and wheat pricing. So I was going with Starkey and when Al Garthoff retired, and I was going with Starkey, some to Wheat Council meetings and things like that. And I was shifted over to ASCS. Anyway, I ended up being made head of the wheat export subsidy branch in ASCS and that was under commodity operations division or something like that, Cliff Pulvermacher.

Q: Well, you at one point were working for the Export Marketing Service.

SEVERIN: Well, okay, I'm getting there. I'm getting there.

Q: So this is before then.

SEVERIN: Oh, yes. This is before then.

Q: All right.

SEVERIN: This is before then, and you see that Johnson is stilit's still the Democrats are in there. The Democrats are there. Kennedy's been assassinated, Johnson's come in and Johnson's been elected. So politics come through all of this stuff in ways that are not that apparent.

So I'm head of the wheat export subsidy branch, and we announce our subsidy every afternoon at 3:30 and that will prevail until the next afternoon until 3:00 for different classes of wheat at different ports, the Gulf or the west coast. And so I'm learning more about this. This is in '66 and '67, and then I'm brought into the Kennedy Round negotiations in Geneva. I'm in on that, part of the crowd there and Mattie Sharpless was the secretary there at the time in Geneva.

Q: What was your role, then, in the Kennedy Round. Was it a matter of within the GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] trying to redefine or reduce agricultural supports? Because the chief agricultural negotiator there was Ray loanes.

SEVERIN: Worthington, really.

Q: Howard Worthington.

SEVERIN: And then, too, it all depends. Or it would be Erwin Hedges. He thought that he was, and between Erwin Hedges and Howard Worthington, Howard would go, "Well, who talked to John Schnittker last?" That kind of thing. But it was really working with the other wheat-exporting countries to bring about some kind of order to the wheat export markets.

Q: Discipline?

SEVERIN: Discipline, yes, because you had the Australian Wheat Board, you had the Canadian Wheat Board, you had the Argentine junta and then you had the EC [European Community] and then there was us, everybody different and everybody looking out for their own way and everybody having their own tool for getting to it.

I got to know very well, and a lot of respect, particularly for Len Dorman, and Len Dorman was the general manager of the Australian Wheat Board. It was always interesting because they competed with the wheats, particularly going to Japan, but particularly competing with the wheats that we shipped out of the Pacific Northwest.

Those markets always moved in terms of a half-penny, and other places, they always went on a whole penny, out of the Gulf and maybe out of the lakes. But that's what the part of the Kennedy Round that I was with. Then we had Fred Sanderson from the State Department, who thought that he knew everything. Then we had Ozzie Blake from ERS [Economic Research Service], thought that they knew everything. Novotny [Donald J. Novotny, first a branch chief and later director of the FAS Grain and Feed Division] was in on this, too, but it was basically providing support and knowledge back to Ed Jaenke. And if Ed Jaenke and Ray Ioanes showed up, the other side knew that we weren't kidding.

Well, all of this then gave way to December of 1967, when the International Grains Arrangement got negotiated. We spent that summer in Rome. It was interesting to me because of the different attitudes that each of these different countries would take. The Australian was the one that was trying to screw us at the time. They'd put up their map of the world. Well, if you look at a map of the world we put up, the United States is in the middle of it. The Australian puts up a map and, hey, Australia's right in the middle of it.

Hal Lomgren, Harold Lomgren, who lives out here, I think somewhere in Fauquier, he was our head negotiator in Rome. The Australians were so good, they would take him out and get him liquored up the night before a big session the next day. The Australians are slick, but you know what? Something that never comes through and the reason we had to accede to the Australians more than anybody else. We had to put Hard Red Winter ordinary wheat at $1.68 FOB [free on board] Gulf, United States Gulf. That was the standard wheat, or wheat against all else was measured.

The reason we had to do that is because of all the support we were getting from the Australians in Vietnam. That's the reason. It's generally not known, but that's the reason we had to accede to it. All right, so then, you've got this grade of wheat. Well, what is the price differential between that and any other wheat, and what does it cost to go from United States Gulf ports to Amsterdam or to someplace else?

So you've got all the variables involved, plus the fact that at that juncture, what was the main wheat that the Australian was exporting? FAQ, Fair Average Quality. Well, what the hell is that? They've got wheat as good as any we produce in the United States. They've got wheat as good as anything in Canada and then, too. All right? So what was the Canadian wheat? Manitoba number one, Manitoba number two, Manitoba number three, quad, Canadian Western Amber Drum. Well, what the hell is that? They had us coming and going.

It's all because Mr. Johnson needed their support in Vietnam, and, needless to sal wrote a paper. I wish I could find it. I wrote a paper, a history of international grains arrangement after one year, and it fell apart. And I was very lucky. This is after Johnson didn't run anymore and Nixon came in. So we went from the Democrats to the Republicans, and that's when Pulvermacher, that's when the Export Marketing Service was created, and Pulvermacher was no longer head of the Commodity Operations Division within ASCS, but all of that became the Export Marketing Service. He, as Commodities Operations Division director, became the General Sales Manager. That's how that happened, when that happened.

And Charlie Pence, then, had been brought in, and Charlie had been big in Kansas State Wheat Commission or something. Charlie was real smart, a lot of common sense. Coughed, smoked too damn much, just about killed himself. And so he was brought in, brought in as my boss, and we were together in ASCS for a little bit before this other whole thing came about and then Charlie was made head of the Grain Division within the Export Marketing Service.

They didn't know what to do with me, so that's then when I was given the illustrious title of chief of the International Agreements staff, but actually I was Charlie's deputy. Bill Rosacker then was head of the wheat branch and I think Win Tuttle was head of the coarse grains branch. Because of Uncle Hubert, Dave Humphrey was left alone and he was head of the rice branch. He was left alone, but I was ever so lucky, in a way. I was lucky.

The first day, I was not lucky, but the second day I was lucky. That was in 1973, I reckon, when it turned out. Let's see, in '72, the Soviets bought a lot of feed grains, because Brezhnev had said it was time to upgrade the quality of the diet, and we're going to do it through proteins and we don't have enough feed grains, so we're going to feed our livestock better.

Well, in '73, they got surprised. Clarence Palmby had gone back and gone to Continental in maybe March or April, something like that, and the Soviets showed up to buy a bunch of wheat. Charlie Pence wasn't in that day. Pulvermacher was not in that day, but Frank McKnight was there and he called me. He said, "Keith, what do you think the price of Hard Red Winter at the Gulf ought to be?"

I looked and I said, "Well, we've got a dime subsidy on it now. Our domestic price at the Gulf is $1.73 and to make it compete, it looks like $1.63 ought to be about where it ought to be, a dime subsidy." He said, "Okay."

He called Carroll Brunthaver, lying bastard, and they said, "Dollar-sixty-three is the price of Hard Red Winter at the Gulf," and that's when the Soviets started buying and they bought and bought and bought and bought and we held $1.63. Of course, domestic price went up and that dime subsidy went right on up.

So then we decided, or figured out, that the next month that maybe we had done this too long and we needed to change our subsidy policy. And so Brunthaver told Charlie Pence through Pulvermacher or Frank McKnight to call the six big ones and tell them that we're going to have a meeting tomorrow, tell them we're going to change our wheat export subsidy policy.

Well, Charlie's got a lot of common sense. He said, "Hey, I just can't call the six big ones. Everybody's got to know about it." So, anyway, that meeting was postponed until everybody could get to Washington, but Brunthaver later on said that he didn't tell Charlie to do all that stuff. But I'm glad that Charlie was there and it wasn't on my neck, but I was the guy that said that the dime was okay, but didn't have any idea what else was going on.

Q: Yes, well, you didn't know at that time that the Soviets were having another short crop and that they were going to come into the market as big as they were.

SEVERIN: Yes.

Q: When we were in California in 2003, when I went out with the Senior Seminar, we met with George Shultz, and George Shultz was in Nixon's cabinet at that time. I think he was secretary of labor or secretary of commerce or something at time. And he told us the story of how satellite imagery started to enter the picture, because he said it turned out USDA didn't really have much in the way of a satellite imagery capability at that point. Other parts of the government did.

So he said we started, as members of the cabinet, trying to figure out how can we get satellite imagery in here to start estimating the Soviet grain crop? Do you know anything about the origins of that and the LACIE [Large Area Crop Inventory Estimate] project and how that got underway in the wake of the Great Grain Robbery? Or were you in on that at all?

SEVERIN: Not really, not really, but I do know, and that's one of the things that I made a note to myself about, is that in 1974, under the Joint Cooperation Agreement, the Soviets could send teams here to look at things that they were interested in, and we could send teams there to look at things that we were interested in.

Well, in 1974, I went over there with the first winter grains team. I don't know how many teams I went with, but it was a whole batch, and I went from '74, and my last team that went with was in 1989, when they finally let me go to Saratov, where Saratov dvadtsat' vos'maya, [Saratov 28, a wheat variety] the best spring wheat that they grew, that's where it was bred. And that's also where their millewhat do I want to say?

Q: Proso?

SEVERIN: No, the other one. Not millet, sorghum, but, anyway, that's also where they breed that, there. But, anyway, from '74 to '89, I don't know how many trips I took, going over there. And after we started using satellite imagery, it was a gradual kind of thing. After we started using satellite imagery, several times I know that I went to Houston and would look at their imagery. I would do that before going over there with a team. And I'd have an idea. I'd say, well, let's see, there's Kustanay. The way things look, they're not going to let me go south of town, probably going to go east, toward Kotchetov, and almost without fail, I could predict where we would be permitted to go, where we would not be permitted to go.

Q: Depending on crop conditions.

SEVERIN: Depending on the imagery. But, now, imagery is only one tool. It's an image. You don't know. You've got green mass, and you've got mass there, but what's in the mass? How has that kernel in that head been affected by weather? You still need ground truth.

Q: You still need the ground truth. You don't know what the weediness is. You don't really have a sense of how much moisture there is from that. You need a lot of other data points.

SEVERIN: It's a good tool.

Q: It's a good tool, and it remains a good tool to this day, but it has to be augmented with ground truth.

SEVERIN: Without a doubt, and I know I was pleased to be able to have it. And, coming back from those trips, invariably, Runov would ask me into his office alone to tell him what I had seen out there. I said, "Well, ask your people. They're out there everyday." He said, "But you tell the truth and they lie to me."

Q: That's still true.

SEVERIN: What was that one, the attachï¿½ that was over there after Neetz? Alan?

Q: Trick?

SEVERIN: Trick, yes. They treated me real bad on this one trip. I said to hell with them, I'm not going to tell them what I saw. He said, "You've got to tell them. That's your job." I said, "That isn't my job."

And I'll tell you, more than once, too, the Exportkhleb people would ask me what do I think, what do I see? I made them mad as hell one time. I said, "You've people got all kinds of wonderful wheat out there, particularly where I just came from, some wonderful durum, but you don't know how to handle it. You're not handling it right.

"It's there in the field and it's combined. You've got it in the bin of the combine, but then you just commingle it." But, in a way, I kind of stick my chest out, that Runov and Exportkhleb particularly would ask me what did I think, because they knew what I was looking at. I had a track record.

And in this regard, too, somewhere upstairs I've got a booked autographed and so on and so forth, Zhores Medvedev, and he thought that we'd done a good job. One of the questions that you asked me, how did we measure? We didn't have a base.

I never tried to measure it. I measured change. That's what makes the market, how much more, how much less, and then, too, something that those people down in the World Board never had a clue about, was quality. That was one of my arguments. I've forgotten that gal's name, but she went on up to the Hill. She was big there on the World Board there for a while.

They were like the joke about the dog that's ugly, doesn't like his tail, they cut it off a little bit at a time. Hell, cut it off and get rid of it. That's what I always try to do is as quick as I could come up with what the final number was going to be. But those people at the World Board, they would want to do it ponemnozhku [bit by bit]. That didn't get it done.

Q: Well, just a couple of notes to interject. Boris Runov is still alive. He's just passed his 80th birthday last year and is working out of the library there. I just bumped into him about a week and a half ago in Moscow. And he said, "Oh, you need to come and see me and we'll have some tea and we'll chat." So he wants me to come over and visit him when I get back.

SEVERIN: Well, tell him a big howdy.

Q: I will do that.

SEVERIN: Did you ever had an opportunity to call my friend, Irene.

Q: I have not called her yet.

SEVERIN: Really, do it.

Q: I want to do that when I can set aside time to go over there.

SEVERIN: Oh, sure. Oh, yes.

Q: I didn't want to call her and then think I've fulfilled the obligation and forgot about it. I want to do it when then I can make a date with her to go over and visit and see her and Pozdnyakov and others. I want to make a visit...

SEVERIN: Because those folks, and Irene, particularly, mean so much to me and I said a moment ago that I traveled a lot with grain teams between '74 and '89. Getting the teams put together right, usually there would be three of us.

Q: Well, how valuable were the teams in terms of being able to actually do an assessment of what the grain crop was going to look like, compared to when you were there in the '60s and you really were not getting much in the way of ground truth? Was it helpful?

SEVERIN: I thought so. I thought so. Usually, I would lead the team and then we would have somebody from USDA and then we would have somebody from the trade, an agronomist or a farmer or somebody. And I thought that they were very helpful, because human nature is, you're going to show something to somebody, aren't you going to go out of your way to show them the best you've got? All right, that's what we did. They'd always take us to the experiment places. They would take us to the model farm, or whatever.

Well, this is as good as they've got, so there you have a mark from which to work. That's the way I looked at it. That's the way I looked at it, so, in that regard, they were useful.

And, again, it goes back to measuring change, as it were. You see, in addition to taking teams over theran aside for a minute. I've always had something to do with briefing the team, and somebody would just scare the hell out of them, not only what he would have to say and how he would say it, but how he would look like. Remember Bill Nolan? He had some kind of the matter with his jaw and his face was misshapen, and being a security guy, and pretty taciturn, I always got a kick out of him. The last thing he would say, he'd say, "Go over there and do your job, and don't worry, we haven't lost anybody over there yet."

But the flipside of me going there is how many teams that I have accompanied here and I know 1977, it was, I know I was there in '76. We took a grain storage and handling team, and then we had the flipside of that here in '78, and Irene was with me on both sides. And, again, you learn things in those instances by the questions they ask, about what it is they're interested in. So you've got to be perceptive.

Q: There are a couple of other things here on grain trade that I'd like to get your perspective on. One of them was that after Export Marketing Service came back to FAS and still at that point the Soviet Union was the world's largest importer of grains, and so it became absolutely critical for us to know first of all what their production was going to be and then also what their import intentions were going to be, so there was a tremendous amount of effort put into that, and this led ultimately to the long-term agreements. And so if you could talk a little bit about the genesis of the long-term agreements and also, then, shortly after that we did the long-term agreements and then in 1980 the Soviets classified their grain production data. So we went for five years where they would not publish grain production data. We could get area, but we could not get yield. We knew how much was planted and how much was harvested, but that was it.

So it became rather more difficult to know what benchmark we were measuring against, and yet, at the end of that period, and I was there in '86 when we finally got that five-year data series and I typed up the telegram that sent it back to Washington, and the next day got the word from Washington that our error over that five years had been 1.6 percent on average. Basically, it was rounding error.

Could you talk a little bit about the LTAs, and then also about what it was like estimating the Soviet grain crop during the period when they had declared those data secret?

SEVERIN: Well, frankly, in the terms that you just have used, as strange as it may seem, I don't remember this, because probably I was so tied up in it. I was so tied up in it and messing with the trees in the forest, rather than the forest and just, needless to say, I was up to my eyeballs in trying to estimate the grain crop and all the little bits and pieces and at that time, too, going with teams. I was also doing other traveling. I've been to Australia a couple of times, looking, and wherever there's wheat, I've been, and trying to put it into context and that was one thing about me, I was never really in the policy area. I was in more nearly the what, rather than the so what area.

And I know things that I would see over there on some trips and I'd come home and I'd read some classified reports getting ready to go out and I had some major inputs on corrections.

Q: Of the production numbers.

SEVERIN: Of production numbers, and it would be because I knewell, first place, I was on the ground and other folks didn't get that opportunity to go on the ground. And then secondly, just as importantly, I knew what I was looking at.

Q: Fast-forwarding then to the mid '80s, when you and I worked together and I was over there and you were in Washington and we had our interactions, did a couple of trips together, and then '89, '90, Soviet Union starts coming apart at the seams. In '91, it collapses, and by that time, you'd retired.

SEVERIN: I retired on the 3rd of November of '89.

Q: And in '91, Under Secretary Dick Crowder asked you to come back, and we brought you back to USDA to advise him on what to do with the now-collapsed Soviet Union, that as of December of '91 had passed into history. What was he having you do and what can you tell us about that period?

SEVERIN: Fun, fun.

Q: I remember one trip with you where you and David Schoonover and I were in Novosibirsk and we went to midnight Easter services at the cathedral in Novosibirsk. Do you remember that?

SEVERIN: It wasn't the midnight Easter services, it was the first midnight Easter services that they had had there.

Q: That's right.

SEVERIN: It was the first one that they had had there. Everybody was in there and everybody was carrying a candle and you wanted to be careful not to burn somebody or to get burnt. I've never had a bigger body massage in my life than that, but just a moment. Go back a little bit. Right after I retired from USDA, I went to work to work with Jaenke and Associates. Does the name Jim Webster mean anything to you?

Q: Journalist.

SEVERIN: Journalist, I've forgotten the name of his newsletter.

Q: I don't remember, either.

SEVERIN: But he put a newsletter out every week. When I retired, Keith Severin tootin' a little bit. What Jim wrote was that Keith Severin probably knows more about Soviet agriculture than anybody except maybe Gorbachev and he's not real sure about Gorby. He's retired and leaving the USDA. That's what Jim wrote.

After I went with Jaenke, I did a lot of different things, but I worked, did some for ADM [Archer Daniels Midland]. I went there, and ADM was a part of the American Trade Consortium, or something like that, with RJR Nabisco. Chevron was in on it and Jim Giffin and some of those folks.

Anyway, I went over there and Julie Zavon and Jack Reed, who was vice-president of...

Q: Tobacco Associates.

SEVERIN: No, no, no, ADM.

Q: ADM, okay.

SEVERIN: Anyway, we were the three from ADM on that American Trade Consortium group, something like that. And we went over there and it was all in Central Asia and I'm pretty sure it was Nazarbayev who had his airplane come up to Moscow and meet us and carry us around all the time we were down there. And we were several places in Kazakhstan and I think we were in Osh, as well.

When we were there in Alma Ata, he introduced us, a big meeting and he introduced us to his cabinet. I knew his minister of agriculture, Dvurechenskiy.

Q: Yes, Dvurechenskiy, yes.

SEVERIN: From Kustanay. And, anyway, after the meeting was over, he came up with Dvurechenskiy and I introduced him to Jack Reed and to Julie, and he said, "Yes, I've known everything from before Gorbachev no-alcohol campaign days."

But we were there and had some howdy-do sessions, as I say, and had a party with Nazarbayev, who is coming here real soon, was there. And, anyway, Nazarbayev and I toasted one another with kumys [Fermented mare's milk]. And then another time, under Crowdel took two trips, three trips, under Crowder's auspices, maybe four. But one time he sent me with Andrew "the Nastios" [Andrew Natsios, at the time USAID's Assistant Administrator for Europe, and a decade and a half later USAID Administrator]. Andrew was going to go over there and check things out with getting some food aid to help the Soviets and that.

Well, the USDA did not trust USAID very much, so I went along with them, with Andrew, and Andrew was holding forth very well there in Moscow. Then we on down to Alma Ata and we were hosted, cared for, by Andrew's counterpart, who happened to be a member of the Kazakh KGB Board, or something like that. He and I got along very well together.

Who was the big honcho there in AID who went off and got himself killed or disappeared?

Q: Fred Cuny.

SEVERIN: Yes, well, he was there, along with one of his little girls, and they were going to go out and do things. I said, "You can't do this, because they told you not to do it. They asked you not to do it."

"We're going to do it anyway. Hell with them." And I said, "You don't know how to treat people." Anyway, so, one afternoon, this Kazakh, who was really a Russian in their KGB office and Andrew and I were going to go somewhere and Andrew started to get in the backseat of the Volga and he said, "No, I want you out go up front with the driver. I want to sit back here with Severin." Kind of get out of our hair.

Cuny was absolutely horrible.

And then you remember Eagleburger's style of management was to keep people like that. Well, he was keeping Armitage and Crowder like that. And so Armitage was getting ready to make a trip, and Crowder sent me along on that one, Gulfstream IV and all that and there was Armitage, a military guy. Armitage's number one helper, fantastic gal. I'll be on her team anytime, she can be on my team anytime, Liz Cheney, a real good, smart gal.

Anyway, there was Armitage, there was Liz, a military guy and his spokesman and Marine General Zinni was along on part of the trip, but we went from here to Brussels to Ankara to Moscow to Frankfurt and back, and I just was there to keep an eye on things from an agricultural point of view and to be ready to answer the questions from an agricultural point of view. Armitage is plenty, plenty smart, and in my book a very decent guy, a very decent guy.

So those were two trips that Crowder asked me to go on. And then the third trip was the one that you and I, on an exchange...

Q: The loaned executive program. That's when we leased that Tupolev 134 for $17,000, and it turned out that was $1,000 more than if we'd flown commercially with the whole group, and this way we could set our own schedule, but we had that Tupolev and they deliberately, I think, gave us a Tupolev that was designed for aerial photography and had a sheaf of wheat painted on the side.

SEVERIN: And Jim sure did a good job on that [James Higgiston, at the time one of the agricultural attachï¿½s in Moscow]. He did a good job on that. And, thinking about Dick Lyng [retired Secretary of Agriculture at the time] and the job that you had, the job that you...

Q: Well, let's try to remember. Who all was on that trip with us? It was headed by Dick Lyng, and they asked him to come back out of retirement to do that. You and I were on that trip, Howard Gochberg of Land O Lakes and...

SEVERIN: I can't remember the name of the young fellow from Supervalu.

Q: Oh, I don't remember his name. Ed Thor was there from one of the universities. He's Eric Thor's younger brother. And then, yes, I've forgotten the name of that fellow from Supervalu.

SEVERIN: And then there was a fellow, I want to say from out in California, real close-mouthed.

Q: That was the fellow from Supervalu who never said anything. No?

SEVERIN: No, Supervalu was a big, tall guy.

Q: Great big tall guy.

SEVERIN: No, no, not him. Maybe I'm getting the Thor fellow mixed up, but the job you had to do, one of the hard jobs you had to do, was to try to keep things out of Dick Lyng's reach that he could drink.

Q: Yes, and I only succeeded part of the time.

SEVERIN: Part of the time. And going back, too, about that trip that I was on with Jack Reed and Julie Zavon. Our trip ended up in Alma Ata, and we were supposed to fly back to Moscow, get on out, fly back here. Well, it just happened that Mr. Dwayne Andreas [Chairman of the Board of ADM] and his wife were there in their airplane from Decatur, so we flew back up with them and flew into Sheremetyevo, all right, fine.

The Andreas got into their limo, Jack and Julie and I got into our limo, and we were taken to town and we were staying at the Intourist. All right, fine. "I'm sorry, Mr. Severin, but we don't have your room. It is not ready for tonight. You're only going to be here tonight?" Yes.

"Is it okay if we put you in the penthouse for tonight?" Okay. But the big thing about that, bigger than that, and to me it was really another mark of change, was that we went out to Novodevichy for some reason. Maybe Jack wanted to see it. Anyway, we went out there and it was late in the afternoon and coming out from one of the small cathedrals there was a young military guy in uniform and his wife or his girlfriend or whatever. They were coming out, and they had just been in to a service, where the priest was very young and there were basically only young people in that service.

Change had begun to come about, just like that last trip that I took officially under USDA, when we went to Saratov. Got out there, went to the church service and we were sitting on one side of the nave. Opposite us was the choir, or the folks who were singing, almost all young and one young gal showed up a little late with a kerchief over her head. But up in the back were two young guys, long hair, powder blue motorcycle jackets, singing up a storm. And we had to leave, we had another appointment. And the priest came to me and the head of the grouTerry, Terry, Terry?

Q: Taylor?

SEVERIN: Terry Taylor, I reckon, and Sam somebody, he was a barley guy, no, an oats guy, from Quaker Oats. I've forgotten Sam's last name. But, anyway, he brought me a big bunch of gladiolas. "Glad to have you here and please give greetings to President Reagan. We know that he is a man of God." And that was an interesting, interesting time.

Do you know, that was the first trip that I ever made over there that we were not taken to the eternal flame in the village, that we were not told about the 20 million people that the Soviets lost in the Great Patriotic War? That stood out to me. That really stood out to me, and that was in 1989, and that told me, or to me it meant, that maybe Gorbachev was bringing some hope to them, that they don't have to look behind. They don't have to use the Great Patriotic War as a thing to hold this country together, that maybe change is taking place. I found that impressive, plus the fact, of course, that they let me go, finally, to Saratov.

Q: Which it had been a closed city forever.

SEVERIN: Which had been a closed city forever.

Q: Well, Saratov is now one of the oblasts that I try to visit regularly, because I have a friend down there who has a small farm that's only 27,000 hectares, four formerly bankrupt state farms that he's cobbled together into a set of production units and that's where I go to see the barley harvest, because that part of Saratov oblast has the highest yields in the oblast. So if I can get a sense there of how well he's doing, I get a sense of...

SEVERIN: You see what I'm saying?

Q: Exactly, because he's running about the best farm in the best section of Saratov oblast, and if I have a sense of what he's doing down there, I get a nice snapshot of how the Volga Valley is doing.

SEVERIN: Thinking back about Dick Lyng, too, one day I got a telephone call there in the office from a fellow, Dr. Cortez Ferdinand Enlo, Jr., a medical doctor, also a businessman. And at that time, he was owner, editor, publisher of a magazine called, "Nutrition Today." Doc Enlo was in World War II, a colonel in bomb assessment, evaluation and that kind of thing.

He is very interested in nutrition, very interested in polar medicine, is a big train buff. He's dead now, and I miss him like anything. He took the train from Frankfurt to Novosibirsk for a polar medicine conference. And he came back from there and wanted to write an article for "Nutrition Today" about food supplies, nutrition, in the Soviet Union. He didn't know enough about it and wanted some help. So he asked his next door neighbor whom he should contact and USDA may be able to help him. Well, his next door neighbor was a fellow by the name of Richard Lyng.

Q: Yes, the world's truly small.

SEVERIN: And I've thought about things kind of unique to Severin or things that have helped, and in June of 1986, Grel can see him. I've forgotten who the other fellow was on the teaoh, Jim Cole, from USDA ERS.

Q: Right, remember him.

SEVERIN: Greg, Greg, Greg. I can see him, a little short fellow from Havre, Montana. Anyway, we were over there in June of 1986. We were in Kiev, and from Borispol to Kiev, we were dosimetered a couple times and squirted down a couple of time, because Chernobyl had just happened two months before.

Q: That's right, end of April.

SEVERIN: April the 26th. Anyway, what a town it was, very quiet town, very subdued, no children, very few young people, not many women.

Q: Everyone had been evacuated and they'd shipped them out.

SEVERIN: And we got back from that trip and we must have been the first Americans down that way, because Art Hartman wanted to see me. I told him about what it was, how the lady who was to escort us around said, "The government's lying to us, we're going to lose all of our beautiful kashtan[Chestnut trees], all of our beautiful chestnuts and chestnut trees." A very different time.

I was there exactly two years later, in June of '88, a different kind of time. Why? They were celebrating the millennium. Kiev is a very different place and, man, the Vladimir Sobor [Cathedral] was loaded with lights and television cameras and all that. I've forgotten who I was with, but we were staying in the Hotel Dnepr, and I'd stayed there in 1964 with Fred Hillhouse, when it was still brand new. That's where our rooms were, but we couldn't eat there.

We had to go over and eat in another hotel, because all of the international clergy, they were staying there in the hotel where we ate, but they couldn't feed them all there, so they were feeding them in the Dnepr. But what a different city it was, just full of pageantry and two years difference.

Yes, I remember staying there in 1964 in the Dnepr. I stayed there with Fred Hillhouse because, I don't know where all we'd been, but we'd flown into Borispol Airport and the hostesI just always managed to have some kind of a magazine that they might be interested iwas sitting on the arm of my seat and looking at the magazine as we landed.

So we landed and got there and whoever it was was supposed to pick us up wasn't there, pick Fred and me up. So there's this hostess, well, very kind, and so she arranged a ride for us to the hotel. So we get there to the hotel, things are a little bit different. Fred and I don't have a room together. They've got him on one end of the hotel, and they've got me on the other end of the hotel, and just who happens to show up but this wonderful hostess lady. Yesli ya mogu Vam pomoch', pomogu [Roughly translated, "If I can be helpful, I'll help you].

That night, when I went to bed in my room, I had the chair up under the door handle and I had my Levis on. It's terrible to have to think those ways.

Q: But, you know, now it's been commercialized. You now don't get one phone call. You get multiple phone calls for the various competing entrepreneurs. In our trip in April, I just had either my wife or my daughter answer the phone. They wouldn't even speak. They'd just hang up as soon as they heard a woman's voice.

SEVERIN: But such times and thinking about that and helping Art Hartman [American Ambassador in Moscow 1981-1987] at that juncture.There was a time, too, I've forgotten what year it wabecause of my knowledge of grains and my experience and my Soviet connections and Soviet experiences, a lot of things have come my way.

NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] had an economic colloquium and the title of it was "The Soviet Economy After Brezhnev." Well, as it turned out, it was after Brezhnev and Andropov. They asked for papers. Okay, I have 30 papers or so, and I was the only guy that they asked to do a paper on agriculture, and that paper still stands in my book. I've thought about it and what the conclusions were.

So, anyway, there we are in Brussels, out at NATO headquarters, and typically the secretary general will have a reception and a luncheon for the delegates. So here we are, all out there drinking kir, a traditional Belgian aperitif, and we're all out there waiting to go to lunch or waiting to be called to sit down. So we're all out there and someone comes to me, "Severin, Severin, Mr. Severin, come on, we have to hurry, because we have to hurry." I said, "Well, what's the matter?"

"Well, Secretary Luns has a very busy afternoon and doesn't have a lot of time." So they take me by the arm and they sit me down on the right hand of Secretary Luns at the head table. So here are all of Barb's colleagues and all these other folks out there, "What in the hell has Severin got going for him?" I don't know.

So I'm up there and sitting by Secretary Luns and he's got a good sense of humor. I tell him a couple of Soviet stories and this and that. And of course there's that story about Khrushchev and Eisenhower and Pravda getting all worked up and they want to find out who's the biggest, strongest leader of the bunch in the free world, so there's going to be some kind of competition between Khrushchev and Eisenhower. What can we do?

Well, Secretary Khrushchev likes to play chess and General Eisenhower plays bridge. Well, he doesn't know anything about that. But General Eisenhower likes to play golf. Golf, hey, we'd use that land to grow wheat on. Well, what are we going to do? So they're just going to run a race. All right, world leaders meet, we're going to have a big competition. So they get out there and they run, and Eisenhower, of course, being a military man and that, a little taller, he beats the short, pudgy Khrushchev. So the paper comes out the next day, "World Leaders Meet, Khrushchev Second, Eisenhower Next to Last."

So it all depends, and I've found in dealing with the Soviets and dealing with those people, their mentality, don't make any final decisions on the first meeting, because the next morning they're going to show up with another way of looking at things, not illogical, not wrong, but just different. So just give them a chance, and I know in taking teams over there, I would be the team leader, almost invariably, but different areas of expertise, different areas of specialty, different areas of knowledge and that.

So I would introduce the team and say, "Today, Mr. Mustard is going to be our spokesman, because this is his area of knowledge." Beforehand, I would tell the team that, "You're going to be the spokesman today and the rest of you keep your mouths shut." Because you'd come out and everybody had a chance to talk, but we didn't learn a damn thing.

I knew when Ken Gilles went over theryou knew who Ken Gilles was, head of FGIS [Federal Grain Inspection Service].

Q: I traveled with him. He and I went to Odessa together once.

SEVERIN: Ken is a good, good guy, and I got to know him originally when he was still vice president of North Dakota State, when I went up there, when I took the Algerian up there, and that was something else I got a chance to do. Wheat growers asked me to go and accompany this Algerian around, not because of my knowledge of Arabic but I could get by pretty well in French and I knew something about wheat, so I traveled with him. And then Pulvermacher and I made a trip to Algeria. I went over there a couple of times with that.

But Ken Gilles was getting ready to go over on his first trip. I said, "Ken, you can get by with something that nobody else can get by with. This is your first trip. You can go over there and asked all kinds of basic, stupid questions, and don't let them say let's go see this guy, or go see this guy, or go see that guy. Just say, 'I want everybody who has anything at all to do with this subject to be together at one time and one place,' so they can't say it's another department, it's another department, it's another department."

But you learn these things, how to manage a team, and managing or selecting team members. I was usually, except for the USDA guys like Jim Cole or Christian, whatever, except for those folks, my main thing in finding out, and Bill Nolan backed me up 100 percent, my main thing was how do they comport themselves? Do they try to eat and drink everything in sight?

Q: Any last story that you want to share with us, a final comment, any kind of a last reflection, or anything you've left off of your list?

SEVERIN: I mentioned this to Barbara, who's got ever so much sense. It may not mean anything, it may not mean anything at all, but in dealing with the Sovietand Kenneth has found this out, too, in some of the international conferences he goes tbut the fact that po-russki menya zovut Severin. [In Russian I'm called Severin, pronounced Russian-style, see-vee-REEN]. I've got a name that doesn't put them off. It's not a Smith, it's not a Jones. I don't know if it's a little bit of a door opener or not, is that I have a name, my name, our name, it's a Russian name. It may not mean a thing, but still, with my background, with my experiences, what a lucky guy I am. I acknowledge it, and the people that I've been able to be associated with.

I remembered one night, it was before I retired, Ann Veneman was acting administrator of FAS, and there was a Soviet over visiting, and what an embarrassment. He was over and visiting, a writer, a respected writer, Yuriy Chernichenko.

Q: He's still around, and he still comes to my receptions.

SEVERIN: Hey, tell him.

Q: I will tell him.

SEVERIN: Tell him I thank him for the offer, I genuinely thank him for the offer and I'm just sorry I didn't take him up on it, but I still might.

There was a gal here in town that worked for the Farm Journal or farm somebody, one of the publications, and she had a meeting at her house, or a reception one night at her house. The muckety-mucks were there, Bob Bergland, former secretary of agriculture was there. I want to say Hathaway was there. A bunch of the muckety-mucks were there, and I got there a little bit late and had come straight from the office and knocked on the door.

This gal didn't answer the door, but Yuriy Chernichenko came over and he answered the door, just close by. I didn't know him, I said hello. So we started talking and he just ignored the muckety-mucks that were over there, just he and I, and he wanted to know how I was and what I'd been doing and my experiences. And, at that time, he was still associated with "Krokodil," and he asked me if I would be interested in writing an article for him about my experiences over there and what I saw and what I thought and how things were going, and just in general. I should have done it.

Then the next morning, FAS staff meeting, he was there and Ann Veneman was going to introduce him. She said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I just can't pronounce your last name. I hope you don't mind if I just call you Yuriy." So she said, "Our group here would be glad to have you." I was just a little muckety-muck up in the grain division, up off on the side over there, and that was fine, but someone had said I'd better go, so I went down and I was just sitting at the back.

So she asked Chernichenko if he would tell us something about agriculture in his country. He said, "This is good. Yes, I'll be glad to do that." He says, "And, Keith, if I make any mistakes here, will you help me, please?" It's just kind of one of the other little things along the road.

Q: Good.

SEVERIN: But I'm pretty egotistical about some of this stuff, but not without some basis.

In 1963, an indication of how bad the Soviet grain crop was was that we would go out and buy bread, or try to buy bread, there that summer. And there would be lines at the bakeries or at the bread stores, of people waiting to get the bread. Some of that bread was really, really green, because they had put a lot of peas into the grist. Pea flour was in there along with wheat flour and goodness only knows what else. It was just as heavy as it could be, and I recall one time going down, waiting in line on Friday morning, got a couple of loaves of bread, wrapped them in plastic, packaged them up, put them into the Friday evening pouch going back to Washington.

Stan Brown, later ol sent them to Stan at FAS Washingtoand they were in Secretary Freeman's Tuesday morning staff meeting. That's one of the ways we tried to keep people informed of what was going on, and I thought that that was a show-and-tell operation and Stan was very impressed. Needless to say, Mr. Freeman was very impressed, and he sometimes reminded me of that later on, after I'd retired and was working for Jaenke. And sometimes he and I would get off the Metro at the same time, same place. We'd go along and visit.

It was quite a time, and I remember, too, being Riazon later on that year and I was traveling with Peter Bridges. We met somebody out there, some local, in the hotel restaurant that evening, and he was talking about how bad the vodka was. He said, "It's as if they're putting kerosene in it." But that's how bad the 1963 grain crop was.

Something else that comes to mind, again, having to do with the Soviets, only this is 1972, when they bought so much in the way of feed grains. I was in the Export Marketing Service there, in EMS, at the time, and how many letters we got, how much correspondence there was from people complaining about the amount of feed grains that we were selling and exporting to the Soviet Union.

People would write a letter to each of their senators, to their congressman, to the president and to the secretary of agriculture. It would be the same letter, but you can imagine the volume of mail that we got. I would come home sometimes with three briefcases full, bring them home at night. What I would do every day, as circumstances would change, as the numbers would change as to what the exports were and that, I would draft four or five paragraphs that would address these different letters, and I would number the paragraphs one, two, three, four, five, six or however many.

And then as I would come across a letter, I would put a note on it, we need paragraph one, three and seven here. This letter needs paragraphs one, two and four. This was in the days when there were automatic typewriters at best, forget about computers. And we had all the ladies there in Export Marketing Service working on this, and Jane Proctor was so good, and Sally Berger was so good and Beth Hester, who is still around, Elizabeth Hesteor maybe she's married. Oh, Beth Callanan now. [Elizabeth Callanan, retired FAS marketing specialist]. We would write these letters, and what we would do is we would keep them.

We set up a filing system, and so we would say that the ones coming from the congressman, that this has already been responded to, the same letter was sent to the secretary of agriculture. We got to have some real correspondence, and we had one B-17 pilot, Bill Boyd, and I don't know how many times that he would write to us.

And we made some fun out of this. Sometimes people would write and would not sign a letter, but we could tell. We kept files on all of this. So we would write back to them and say, "As you said in your unsigned letter of August the 17th," or something like that. One of the funniest letters, and this kind of goes along, maybe, with the same kind of letter that Weyland Beeghly wrote about the sugar beet crop after Chernobyl, or the size of the sugar beets, we got this letter from this dog. And he was so concerned about the amount of grain being sent to the Soviet Union that his master would not be able to buy beef bones for him anymore, and that where am I and my other brother dogs and cats going to find the feed, the meat for the feed that we need? Well, that was a real hoot.

So for the heck of it, just for the heck of it, Beth Hester, who has got a fantastic sense of humor, wrote a letter back and said that, "I assure you, and President Nixon assures you, and that Secretary Butz assures you that we're going to have plenty of feed to continue to produce beef and pork and milk, that no one is going to starve, no one is going to be hurt here. And President Nixon has asked me to write this back to you," and signed the letter King Timahoe, who was Nixon's Irish setter.

Well, this letter went on up to George Shanklin, who was assistant general sales manager at the time, something like that, and we sent it on up to George. He thought that was pretty funny and we sent the letter out. But I would come home, really, with three briefcases a night. But we would keep it current. They would be canned, this paragraph and this paragraph and this paragraph needed to respond to that. But they really worked at it, and we got it done.

End of interview